W. Sutton

Xmas 1908.

THE GHOST KINGS

Works by H. Rider Haggard

ROMANCES

King Solomon's Mines.
She.
Allan Quatermain.
Maiwa's Revenge.
Mr. Meeson's Will.
Allan's Wife.
Cleopatra.
Eric Brighteyes.
Nada the Lily.
Montezuma's Daughter.
The People of the Mist.
Heart of the World.
Swallow.
Black Heart and White Hear
Lysbeth.
Pearl Maiden.
The Brethren.
Ayesha: The Return of She.
Benita.
Fair Margaret.

The World's Desire.

(*In collaboration with Andrew Lang.*

NOVELS

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The Witch's Head.
Jess.
Colonel Quaritch, V.C.
Beatrice.
Joan Haste.
Doctor Therne.
Stella Fregelius.

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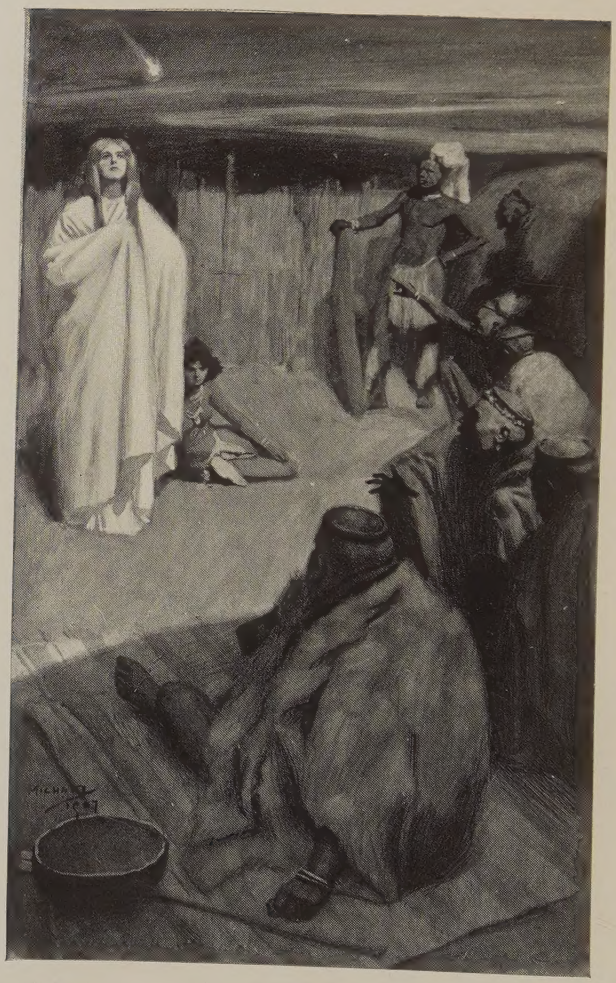

"Such a star runs ever before the death of kings"
(*see page 137*).

THE GHOST KINGS

BY

H. RIDER HAGGARD

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY

A. C. MICHAEL

FOURTH IMPRESSION

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EXTRACT

FROM LETTER HEADED "THE KING'S KRAAL, ZULULAND, 12TH MAY, 1855"

"THE Zulus about here have a strange story of a white girl who in Dingaan's day was supposed to 'hold the spirit' of some legendary goddess of theirs who is also white. This girl, they say, was very beautiful and brave, and had great power in the land before the battle of the Blood River, which they fought with the emigrant Boers. Her title was Lady of the Zulus, or more shortly, Zoola, which means Heaven.

"She seems to have been the daughter of a wandering, pioneer missionary, but the king, I mean Dingaan, murdered her parents, of whom he was jealous, after which she went mad and cursed the nation, and it is to this curse that they still attribute the death of Dingaan, and their defeats and other misfortunes of that time.

"Ultimately, it appears, in order to be rid of this girl and her evil eye, they sold her to the doctors of a dwarf people, who lived far away in a forest and worshipped trees, since when nothing more has been heard of her. But according to them the curse stopped behind.

"If I can find out anything more of this curious story I will let you know, but I doubt if I shall be able to do so. Although fifteen years or so have passed since Dingaan's

death in 1840 *the Kaffirs are very shy of talking about this poor lady, and, I think, only did so to me because I am neither an official nor a missionary, but one whom they look upon as a friend because I have doctored so many of them. When I asked the Indunas about her at first they pretended total ignorance, but on my pressing the question, one of them said that 'all that tale was unlucky and "went beyond" with Mopo.' Now Mopo, as I think I wrote to you, was the man who stabbed King Chaka, Dingaan's brother. He is supposed to have been mixed up in the death of Dingaan also, and to be dead himself. At any rate he vanished away after Panda came to the throne."*

THE GHOST KINGS

CHAPTER I

THE GIRL

The afternoon was intensely, terribly hot. Looked at from the high ground where they were encamped above the river, the sea, a mile or two to her right —for this was the coast of Pondo-land—to little Rachel Dove staring at it with sad eyes, seemed an illimitable sheet of stagnant oil. Yet there was no sun, for a grey haze hung like a veil beneath the arch of the sky, so dense and thick that its rays were cut off from the earth which lay below silent and stifled. Tom, the Kaffir driver, had told her that a storm was coming, a father of storms, which would end the great drought. Therefore he had gone to a kloof in the mountains where the oxen were in charge of the other two native boys—since on this upland there was no pasturage—to drive them back to the waggon. For, as he explained to her, in such tempests cattle are apt to take fright and rush away for miles, and without cattle their plight would be even worse than it was at present.

At least this was what Tom said, but Rachel, who had been brought up among natives and understood their mind, knew that his real reason was that he wished to be out of the way when the baby was buried. Kaffirs do not like death, unless it comes by the assegai in war, and Tom, a good creature, had been fond of that baby during its short, little life. Well, it was buried now; he had finished digging its resting-place in the hard soil before he went. Rachel,

poor child, for she was but fifteen, had borne it to its last bed, and her father had unpacked his surplice from a box, put it on and read the Burial Service over the grave. Afterwards together they had filled in that dry, red earth, and rolled stones on to it, and as there were few flowers at this season of the year, placed a shrivelled branch or two of mimosa upon the stones—the best offering they had to make.

Rachel and her father were the sole mourners at this funeral, if we may omit two rock rabbits that sat upon a shelf of stone in a neighbouring cliff, and an old baboon which peered at these strange proceedings from its crest, and finally pushed down a boulder before it departed, barking indignantly. Her mother could not come because she was ill with grief and fever in a little tent by the waggon. When it was all over they returned to her, and there had been a painful scene.

Mrs. Dove was lying on a bed made of the cartel, or frame strung with strips of green hide, which had been removed from the waggon, a pretty, pale-faced woman with a profusion of fair hair. Rachel always remembered that scene. The hot tent with its flaps turned up to let in whatever air there might be. Her mother in a blue dressing-gown dingy with wear and travel, from which one of the ribbon bows hung by a thread, her face turned to the canvas and weeping silently. The gaunt form of her father with his fanatical, saint-like face, pale beneath its tan, his high forehead over which fell one grizzled lock, his thin, set lips and far-away grey eyes, taking off his surplice and folding it up with quick movements of his nervous hands, and herself, a scared, wondering child, watching them both and longing to slip away to indulge her grief in solitude. It seemed an age before that surplice was folded, pushed into a linen bag which in their old home used to hold dirty clothes, and finally stowed away in a deal box with a broken hinge. At length

it was done, and her father straightened himself with a sigh, and said in a voice that tried to be cheerful:

"Do not weep, Janey. Remember this is all for the best. The Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

Her mother sat up looking at him reproachfully with her blue eyes, and answered in her soft Scotch accent:

"You said that to me before, John, when the other one went, down at Grahamstown, and I am tired of hearing it. Don't ask me to bless the Lord when He takes my babes, no, nor any mother, He Who could spare them if He chose. Why should the Lord give me fever so that I could not nurse it, and make a snake bite the cow so that it died? If the Lord's ways are such then those of the savages are more merciful."

"Janey, Janey, do not blaspheme," her father had exclaimed. "You should rejoice that the child is in Heaven."

"Then do you rejoice and leave me to grieve. From to-day I only make one prayer, that I may never have another. John," she added with a sudden outburst, "it is your fault. You know well I told you how it would be. I told you that if you would come this mad journey the babe would die, aye, and I tell you"—here her voice sank to a kind of wailing whisper—"before the tale is ended others will die too, all of us, except Rachel there who was born to live her life. Well, for my part, the sooner the better, for I wish to go to sleep with my children."

"This is evil," broke in her husband, "evil and rebellious——"

"Then evil and rebellious let it be, John. But why am I evil if I have the second sight like my mother before me. Oh! she warned me what must come if I married you, and I would not listen, now I warn you, and you will not listen. Well, so be it,

we must dree our own weird, everyone of us, a short one; all save Rachel who was born to live her life. Man, I tell you, that the Spirit drives you on to convert the heathen just for one thing, that the heathen may make a martyr of you."

"So let them," her father answered proudly. "I seek no better end."

"Aye," she moaned, sinking back upon the cartel, "so let them, but my babe, my poor babe! Why should my babe die because too much religion has made you mad to win a martyr's crown? Martyrs should not marry and have children, John."

Then, unable to bear any more of it, Rachel had fled from the tent, and sat herself down at a distance to watch the oily sea.

It has been said that Rachel was only fifteen, but in Southern Africa girls grow quickly to womanhood; also her experiences had been of a nature to ripen her intelligence. Thus she was quite able to form a judgment of her parents, their virtues and their weaknesses. Rachel was English born, but had no recollection of England since she came to South Africa when she was four years old. It was shortly after her birth that this missionary-fury seized upon her father as a result of some meetings which he had attended in London. He was then a clergyman with a good living in a quiet Hertfordshire parish, and possessed of some private means, but nothing would suit him short of abandoning all his prospects and sailing for South Africa, in obedience to his "call." Rachel knew all this because her mother had often told her, adding that she and her people, who were of a good Scotch family, had struggled against this South African scheme even to the verge of open quarrel.

At length, indeed, it came to a choice between submission and separation. Mr. Dove had declared that not even for her sake would he be guilty of "sin against the Spirit" which had chosen him to bring

light to those who sat in darkness—that is, the Kaffirs, and especially to that section of them who were in bondage to the Boers. For at this time an agitation was in progress in England which led ultimately to the freeing of the slaves of the Cape Dutch, and afterwards to the exodus of the latter into the wilderness and most of those wars with which our generation is familiar. So, as she was devoted to her husband, who, apart from his religious enthusiasm, or rather possession, was in truth a very lovable man, she gave way and came. Before they sailed, however, the general gloom was darkened by Mrs. Dove announcing that something in her heart told her that neither of them would ever see home again, as they were doomed to die at the hands of savages.

Now whatever the reason or explanation, scientifically impossible as the fact might be, it remained a fact that Janey Dove, like her mother and several of her Scottish ancestors, was foresighted, or at least so her kith and kin believed. Therefore, when she communicated to them her conviction as though it were a piece of everyday intelligence, they never doubted its accuracy for a minute, but only redoubled their efforts to prevent her from going to Africa. Even her husband did not doubt it, but remarked irritably that it seemed a pity she could not sometimes be foresighted as to agreeable future events, since for his part he was quite willing to wait for disagreeable ones until they happened. Not that he quailed personally from the prospect of martyrdom; this he could contemplate with complacency and even enthusiasm, but, zealot though he was, he did shrink from the thought that his beautiful and delicate wife might be called upon to share the glory of that crown. Indeed, as his own purpose was unalterable, he now himself suggested that he should go forth to seek it alone.

Then it was that his wife showed an unsuspected

strength of character. She said that she had married him for better or for worse against the wishes of her family; that she loved and respected him, and that she would rather be murdered by Kaffirs in due season than endure a separation which might be lifelong. So in the end the pair of them with their little daughter, Rachel, departed in a sailing ship, and their friends and relations knew them no more.

Their subsequent history up to the date of the opening of this story may be told in very few words. As a missionary the Reverend John Dove was not a success. The Boers in the eastern part of Cape Colony where he laboured, did not appreciate his efforts to Christianise their slaves. The slaves did not appreciate them either, inasmuch as saint though he might be, he quite lacked the sympathetic insight which would enable him to understand that a native with thousands of generations of savagery behind him is a different being from a highly educated Christian, and one who should be judged by another law. Their sins, amongst which he included all their most cherished inherited customs, appalled him, as he continually proclaimed from the housetops. Moreover, when occasionally he did snatch a brand from the burning, and the said brand subsequently proved that it was still alight, or worse still, replaced its original failings by those of the white man, such as drink, theft and lying, whereof before it had been innocent, he would openly condemn it to eternal punishment. Further, he was too insubordinate, or as he called it, too honest, to submit to the authority of his local superiors in the Church, and therefore would only work for his own hand. Finally he caused his "cup to overflow," as he described it, or, in plain English, made the country too hot to hold him, by becoming involved in a bitter quarrel with the Boers. Of these, on the whole, worthy folk, he formed the worst, and in the main a very unjust

opinion, which opinion he sent to England to be reprinted in Church papers, or to the Home Government to be published in Blue-books. In due course these documents reached South Africa again, where they were translated into Dutch and became incidentally one of the causes of the Great Trek.

The Boers were furious and threatened to shoot him as a slanderer. The English authorities were also furious, and requested him to cease from controversy or to leave the country. At last, stubborn as he might be, circumstances proved too much for him, and as his conscience would not allow him to be silent, Mr. Dove chose the latter alternative. The only question was whither he should go. As he was well off, having inherited a moderate fortune in addition to what he had before he left England, his poor wife pleaded with him to return home, pointing out that there he would be able to lay his case before the British public. This course had attractions for him, but after a night's reflection and prayer, he rejected it as a specious temptation sent by Satan.

What, he argued, should he return to live in luxury in England not only unmartyred but a palpable failure, his mission quite unfulfilled ? His wife might go if she liked, and take their surviving children, Rachel and the new-born baby boy, with her (they had buried two other little girls), but he would stick to his post and his duty. He had seen some Englishmen who had visited the country called Natal where white people were beginning to settle. In that land it seemed there were no slave-driving Boers, and the natives, according to all accounts, much needed the guidance of the Gospel, especially a certain king of the people called Zulus, who was named Chaka or Dingaan, he was not sure which. This ferocious person he particularly desired to encounter, having little doubt that in the absence of the contaminating Boer, he would be able to induce him to see the error of his ways

and change the national customs, especially those of fighting, and worse still, of polygamy.

His unhappy wife listened and wept, for now the martyr's crown which she had always foreseen, seemed uncomfortably near, indeed as it were, it glowed blood red within reach of her hand. Moreover, in her heart she did not believe that Kaffirs could be converted, at any rate at present. They were fighting men, as her Highland forefathers had been, and her Scottish blood could understand the weakness, while, as for this polygamy, she had long ago secretly concluded that the practice was one which suited them very well, as it had suited David and Solomon, and even Abraham. But for all this, although she was sure in her uncanny fashion that her baby's death would come of her staying, she refused to leave her husband as she had refused eleven years before.

Doubtless affection was at the bottom of it, for Janey Dove was a very faithful woman; also there were other things—her fatalism, and stronger still, her weariness. She believed that they were doomed. Well, let the doom fall; she had no fear of the Beyond. At the best it might be happy, and at the worst, deep, everlasting rest and peace, and she felt as though she needed thousands of years of rest and peace. Moreover she was sure that no harm would come to Rachel, the very apple of her eye; that she was marked to live and to find happiness even in this wild land. So it came about that she refused her husband's offer to allow her to return home where she had no longer any ties, and for perhaps the twentieth time prepared herself to journey she knew not whither.

Rachel, seated there in the sunless, sweltering heat, reflected on these things. Of course she did not know all the story, but most of it had come under her observation in one way or another, and being shrewd by nature, she could guess the rest, for she

who was companionless had much time for reflection and for guessing. She sympathised with her father in his ideas, understanding vaguely that there was something large and noble about them, but in the main, body and mind, she was her mother's child. Already she showed her mother's dreamy beauty, to which were added her father's straight features and clear grey eyes, together with a promise of his height. But of his character she had little, that is outside of a courage and fixity of purpose which marked them both. For the rest she was far, or fore-seeing, like her mother, apprehending the end of things by some strange instinct; also very faithful in character.

Rachel was unhappy. She did not mind the hardship and the heat, for she was accustomed to both, and her health was so perfect that it would have needed much worse things to affect her. But she loved the baby that was gone, and wondered whether she would ever see it again. On the whole she thought so, for here that intuition of hers came in, but at the best she was sure that there would be long to wait. She loved her mother also, and grieved more for her than for herself, especially now when she was so ill. Moreover she knew and shared her mind. This journey, she felt, was foolishness; her father was a man "led by a star" as the natives say, and would follow it over the edge of the world and be no nearer. He was not fit to have charge of her mother.

Of herself she did not think so much. Still, at Grahamstown, for a year or so there had been other children for companions, Dutch most of them, it is true, and all rough in mind and manner. Yet they were white and human. While she played with them she could forget she knew so much more than they did; that, for instance, she could read the Gospels in Greek—which her father had taught her ever since she was a little child—while they could scarcely spell them out in the Taal, or Boer dialect, and that they

had never heard even of William the Conqueror. She did not care particularly about Greek and William the Conqueror, but she did care for friends, and now they were all gone from her, gone like the baby, as far off as William the Conqueror. And she, she was alone in the wilderness with a father who talked and thought of Heaven all day long, and a mother who lived in memories and walked in the shadow of doom, and oh! she was unhappy.

Her grey eyes filled with tears so that she could no longer see that everlasting ocean, which she did not regret as it wearied her. She wiped them with the back of her hand that was burnt quite brown by the sun, and turning impatiently, fell to watching two of those strange insects known as the Praying Mantis, or often in South Africa as Hottentot gods, which after a series of genuflections, were now fighting desperately among the dead stalks of grass at her feet. Men could not be more savage, she reflected, for really their ferocity was hideous. Then a great tear fell upon the head of one of them, and astonished by this phenomenon, or thinking perhaps that it had begun to rain, it ran away and hid itself, while its adversary sat up and looked about it triumphantly, taking to itself all the credit of conquest.

She heard a step behind her, and having again furtively wiped her eyes with her hand, the only handkerchief available, looked round to see her father stalking towards her.

"Why are you crying, Rachel?" he asked in an irritable voice. "It is wrong to cry because your little brother has been taken to glory."

"Jesus cried over Lazarus, and He wasn't even His brother," she answered in a reflective voice, then by way of defending herself added inconsequently: "I was watching two Hottentot gods fight."

As Mr. Dove could think of no reply to her very

final Scriptural example, he attacked her on the latter point.

"A cruel amusement," he said, "especially as I have heard that boys, yes, and men, too, pit these poor insects against each other, and make bets upon them."

"Nature is cruel, not I, father. Nature is always cruel," and she glanced towards the little grave under the rock. Then while for the second time her father hesitated, not knowing what to answer, she added quickly, "Is mother better now?"

"No," he said, "worse, I think, very hysterical and quite unable to see things in the true light."

She rose and faced him for she was a courageous child, then asked:

"Father, why don't you take her back? She isn't fit to go on. It is wrong to drag her into this wilderness."

At this question he grew very angry, and began to scold and to talk of the wickedness of abandoning his "call."

"But mother has not got a 'call,'" she broke in.

Then, as for the third time he could find no answer, he declared vehemently that they were both in league against him, instruments used by the Evil One to tempt him from his duty by working on his natural fears and affections, and so forth.

The child watched him with her clear grey eyes, saying nothing further, till at last he grew calm and paused.

"We are all much upset," he went on rubbing his high forehead with his thin hand. "I suppose it is the heat and this—this—trial of our faith. What did I come to speak to you about? Oh! I remember; your mother will eat nothing, and keeps asking for fruit. Do you know where there is any fruit?"

"It doesn't grow here, father." Then her face brightened and she added: "Yes it does, though.

The day that we outspanned in this camp mother and I went down to the river and walked to that kind of island beyond the dry donga to get some flowers that grow on the wet ground. I saw lots of Cape gooseberries there, all quite ripe."

"Then go and get some, dear. You will have plenty of time before dark."

She started up as though to obey, then checked herself and said:

"Mother told me that I was not to go to the river alone because we saw the spoor of lions and crocodiles in the mud."

"God will guard you from the lions and the crocodiles, if there are any," he answered doggedly, for was not this an opportunity to show his faith? "You are not afraid, are you?"

"No, father. I am afraid of nothing, perhaps because I don't care what happens. I will get the basket and go at once."

In another minute she was walking quickly towards the river, a lonely little figure in that great place. Mr. Dove watched her uneasily till she was hidden in the haze, for his reason told him that this was a foolish journey.

"The Lord will send His angels to protect her," he muttered to himself. "Oh! if only I could have more faith, all these troubles come upon me from a lack of faith, and through that I am continually tempted. I think I will run after her and go too. No, there is Janey calling me, I cannot leave her alone. The Lord will protect her, but I need not mention to Janey that she has gone, unless she asks me outright. She will be quite safe, the storm will not break to-night."

CHAPTER II

THE BOY

THE river towards which Rachel headed, one of the mouths of the Umtavuna, was much further off than it looked, it was, indeed, not less than a mile and a half away. She had said that she feared nothing, and it was true, for extraordinary courage was one of this child's characteristics. She could scarcely ever remember having felt afraid—for herself, except sometimes of her father when he grew angry—or was it mad that he grew?—and raged at her, threatening her with punishment in another world in reward for her childish sins. Even then the sensation did not last long, because she could not believe in that punishment which he so vividly imagined. So it came about that now she had no fear when there was so much cause.

For this place was lonely; not a living creature could be seen. Moreover, a dreadful hush brooded on the face of earth, and in the sky above; only far away over the mountains the lightning flickered incessantly, as though a monster in the skies were licking their precipices and pinnacles with a thousand tongues of fire. Nothing stirred, not even an insect; every creature that drew breath had hidden itself away until the coming terror was overpast.

The atmosphere was full of electricity struggling to be free. Although she knew not what it was, Rachel felt it in her blood and brain. In some strange way it affected her mind, opening windows there through which the eyes of her soul looked out. She

became aware of some new influence drawing near to her life; of a sudden her budding womanhood burst into flower in her breast, shone on by an unseen sun; she was no more a child. Her being quickened and acknowledged the kinship of all things that are. That brooding, flame-threaded sky—she was a part of it, the earth she trod, it was a part of her; the Mind that caused the stars to roll and her to live, dwelt in her bosom, and like a babe she nestled within the arm of its almighty will.

Now, as in a dream, Rachel descended the steep, rock-strewn banks of the dry branch of the river-bed, wending her way between the boulders and noting that rotten weeds and peeled brushwood rested against the stems of the mimosa thorns which grew there, tokens which told her that here in times of flood the water flowed. Well, there was little enough of it now, only a pool or two to form a mirror for the lightning. In front of her lay the island where grew the Cape gooseberries, or Winter Cherries as they are sometimes called, which she came to seek. It was a low piece of ground a quarter of a mile long, perhaps, but in the centre of it were some great rocks and growing among the rocks, trees, one of them higher than the rest. Beyond it ran the true river, even now at the end of the dry season three or four hundred yards in breadth, though so shallow that it could be forded by an ox-drawn waggon.

It was raining on the mountains yonder, raining in torrents poured from those inky clouds, as it had done off and on for the past twenty-four hours, and above their fire-laced bosom floated glorious-coloured masses of misty vapour, enflamed in a thousand hues by the arrows of the sinking sun. Above her, however, there was no sun, nothing but the curtain of cloud which grew gradually from grey to black and minute by minute sank nearer to the earth.

Walking through the dry river-bed, Rachel reached

the island which was the last and highest of a line of similar islands that, separated from each other by narrow breadths of water, lay like a chain, between the dry donga and the river. Here she began to gather her gooseberries, picking the silvery, octagonal pods from the green stems on which they grew. At first she opened these pods, removing from each the yellow, sub-acid berry, thinking that thus her basket would hold more, but presently abandoned that plan as it took too much time. Also although the plants were plentiful enough, in that low and curious light it was not easy to see them among the dense growth of reedy vegetation.

While she was thus engaged she became aware of a low moaning noise and a stirring of the air about her which caused the leaves and grasses to quiver without bending. Then followed an ice-cold wind that grew in strength until it blew keen and hard, ruffling the surface of the marshy pools. Still Rachel went on with her task for her basket was not more than half full, till presently the heavens above her began to mutter and to groan, and drops of rain as large as shillings fell upon her back and hands. Now she understood that it was time for her to be going, and started to walk across the island—for at the moment she was near its further side—to reach the deep, rocky river-bed or donga.

Before ever she came there, with awful suddenness and inconceivable fury, the tempest burst. A hurricane of wind tore down the valley to the sea, and for a few minutes the darkness became so dense that she could scarcely stumble forward. Then there was light, a dreadful light; all the heavens seemed to take fire, yes, and the earth too; it was as though its last dread catastrophe had fallen on the world.

Buffeted, breathless, Rachel at length reached the edge of the deep river-bed that may have been fifty yards in width, and was about to step into it when

she became aware of two things. The first was a seething, roaring noise so loud that it seemed to still even the bellowing of the thunder, and the next, now seen, now lost, as the lightning pulsed and darkened, the figure of a youth, a white youth, who had dismounted from a horse that remained near to but above him, and stood, a gun in his hand, upon a rock at the further side of the donga.

He had seen her also and was shouting to her, of this she was sure, for although the sound of his voice was lost in the tumult, she could perceive his gesticulations when the lightning flared, and even the movement of his lips. Wondering vaguely what a white boy could be doing in such a place and very glad at the prospect of his company, Rachel began to advance towards him in short rushes whenever the lightning showed her where to set her feet. She had made two of these rushes when from the violence and character of his movements at length she understood that he was trying to prevent her from coming further, and paused confused.

Another instant and she knew why. Some hundreds of yards above her the river bed took a turn and suddenly round this turn, crested with foam, appeared a wall of water in which trees and the carcases of animals were whirled along like straws. The flood had come down from the mountains, and was advancing on her more swiftly than a horse could gallop. Rachel ran forward a little way, then understanding that she had no time to cross, stood bewildered, for the fearful tumult of the elements and the dreadful roaring of that advancing wall of foam overwhelmed her senses. The lightnings went out for a moment, then began to play again with tenfold frequency and force. They struck upon the nearing torrent, they struck in the dry bed before it, and leapt upwards from the earth as though Titans and gods were hurling spears at one another.

In the lurid sheen of them she saw the lad leap from his rock and rush towards her. A flash fell and split a boulder not thirty paces from him, causing him to stagger, but he recovered himself and ran on. Now he was quite close, but the water was closer still. It was coming in tiers or ledges, a thin sheet of foam in front, then other layers laid upon it, each of them a few yards behind its fellow. On the top ledge, in its very crest, was a bull buffalo, dead, but held head on and down as though it were charging, and Rachel thought vaguely that from the direction in which it came in a few moments its horns would strike her. Another second and an arm was about her waist—she noted how white it was where the sleeve was rolled up, dead white in the lightning—and she was being dragged towards the shore that she had left. The first film of waters struck her and nearly washed her from her feet, but she was strong and active, and the touch of that arm seemed to have given her back her wit, so she regained them and splashed forward. Now the next tier took them both above the knees, but for a moment shallowed so that they did not fall. The high bank was scarce five yards away, and the wall of waters perhaps a score.

"Together for life or death!" said an English voice in her ear, and the shout of it only reached her in a whisper.

The boy and the girl leapt forward like bucks. They reached the bank and struggled up it. The hungry waters sprang at them like a living thing, grasping their feet and legs as though with hands; a stick as it whirled by them struck the lad upon the shoulder, and where it struck the clothes were rent away and red blood appeared. Almost he fell, but this time it was Rachel who supported him. Then one more struggle and they rolled exhausted on the ground just clear of the lip of the racing flood.

Thus through tempest, threatened by the waters

of death from which he snatched her, and companioned by heaven's lightnings, did Richard Darrien come into the life of Rachel Dove.

Presently, having recovered their breath, they sat up and looked at each other by lightning light, which was all there was. He was a handsome lad of about seventeen, though short for his years; sturdy in build, very fair-skinned and curiously enough with a singular resemblance to Rachel, except that his hair was a few shades darker than hers. They had the same clear grey eyes, and the same well-cut features; indeed seen together, most people would have thought them brother and sister, and remarked upon their family likeness. Rachel spoke the first.

"Who are you?" she shouted into his ear in one of the intervals of darkness, "and why did you come here?"

"My name is Richard Darrien," he answered at the top of his voice, "and I don't know why I came. I suppose something sent me to save you."

"Yes," she replied with conviction, "something sent you. If you had not come I should be dead now, shouldn't I? In glory, as my father says."

"I don't know about glory, or what it is," he remarked, after thinking this saying over, "but you would have been rolling out to sea in the flood water, like that buffalo, with not a whole bone in you, which isn't my idea of glory?"

"That's because your father isn't a missionary," said Rachel.

"No, he is an officer, naval officer, or at least he was, now he trades and hunts. We are coming down from Natal. But what's your name?"

"Rachel Dove."

"Well, Rachel Dove—that's very pretty, Rachel Dove, as you would be if you were cleaner—it is going to rain presently. Is there any place where we can shelter here?"

"I am as clean as you are," she answered indignantly. "The river muddied me, that's all. You can go and shelter, I will stop and let the rain wash me."

"And die of the cold or be struck by lightning. Of course I knew you weren't dirty really. Is there any place?"

She nodded, mollified.

"I think I know one. Come," and she stretched out her hand.

He took it, and thus hand in hand they made their way to the highest point of the island where the trees grew, for here the rocks piled up together made a kind of cave in which Rachel and her mother had sat for a little while when they visited the place. As they groped their way towards it the lightning blazed out and they saw a great jagged flash strike the tallest tree and shatter it, causing some wild beast that had sheltered there to rush past them snorting.

"That doesn't look very safe," said Richard halting, "but come on, it isn't likely to hit the same spot twice."

"Hadn't you better leave your gun," she suggested, for all this while that weapon had been slung to his back and she knew that lightning has an affinity for iron.

"Certainly not," he answered, "it is a new one which my father gave me, and I won't be parted from it."

Then they went on and reached the little cave just as the rain broke over them in earnest. As it chanced the place was dry, being so situated that all water ran away from it. They crouched in it shivering, trying to cover themselves with dead sticks and brushwood that had lodged here in the wet season when the whole island was under water.

"It would be nice enough if only we had a fire," said Rachel, her teeth chattering as she spoke.

The lad Richard thought a while. Then he opened a leather case that hung on his rifle sling and took from it a powder flask and flint and steel and some tinder. Pouring a little powder on the damp tinder, he struck the flint until at length a spark caught and fired the powder. The tinder caught also, though reluctantly, and while Rachel blew on it, he felt round for dead leaves and little sticks, some of which were coaxed into flame.

After this things were easy since fuel lay about in abundance, so that soon they had a splendid fire burning in the mouth of the cave whence the smoke escaped. Now they were able to warm and dry themselves, and as the heat entered into their chilled bodies, their spirits rose. Indeed the contrast between this snug hiding place and blazing fire of drift wood and the roaring tempest without, conduced to cheerfulness in young people who had just narrowly escaped from drowning.

"I am so hungry," said Rachel, presently.

Again Richard began to search, and this time produced from the pocket of his coat a long and thick strip of sun-dried meat.

"Can you eat biltong?" he asked.

"Of course," she answered eagerly.

"Then you must cut it up," he said, giving her the meat and his knife. "My arm hurts me, I can't."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "how selfish I am. I forgot about that stick striking you. Let me see the place."

He took off his coat and knelt down while she stood over him and examined his wound by the light of the fire, to find that the left upper arm was bruised, torn and bleeding. As it will be remembered that Rachel had no handkerchief, she asked Richard for his, which she soaked in a pool of rain water just outside the cave. Then, having washed the hurt thoroughly, she bandaged his arm with the handkerchief and bade

him put on his coat again, saying confidently that he would be well in a few days.

"You are clever," he remarked with admiration. "Who taught you to bandage wounds?"

"My father always doctors the Kaffirs and I help him," Rachel answered, as, having stretched out her hands for the pouring rain to wash them, she took the biltong and began to cut it in thin slices.

These she made him eat before she touched any herself, for she saw that the loss of blood had weakened him. Indeed her own meal was a light one, since half the strip of meat must, she declared, be put aside in case they should not be able to get off the island. Then he saw why she had made him eat first and was very angry with himself and her, but she only laughed at him and answered that she had learned from the Kaffirs that men must be fed before women as they were more important in the world.

"You mean more selfish," he answered, contemplating this wise little maid and her tiny portion of biltong, which she swallowed very slowly, perhaps to pretend that her appetite was already satisfied with its superabundance. Then he fell to imploring her to take the rest, saying that he would be able to shoot some game in the morning, but she only shook her little head and set her lips obstinately.

"Are you a hunter?" she asked to change the subject.

"Yes," he answered with pride, "that is, almost. At any rate I have shot eland, and an elephant, but no lions yet. I was following the spoor of a lion just now, but it got up between the rocks and bolted away before I could shoot. I think that it must have been after you."

"Perhaps," said Rachel. "There are some about here; I have heard them roaring at night."

"Then," he went on, "while I was staring at you running across this island, I heard the sound of

the water and saw it rushing down the donga, and saw too that you must be drowned, and—you know the rest."

"Yes, I know the rest," she said, looking at him with shining eyes. "You risked your life to save mine, and therefore," she added with quiet conviction, "it belongs to you."

He stared at her and remarked simply:

"I wish it did. This morning I wished to kill a lion with my new *roer*," and he pointed to the heavy gun at his side, "above everything else, but to-night I wish that your life belonged to me—above anything else."

Their eyes met, and child though she was, Rachel saw something in those of Richard that caused her to turn her head.

"Where are you going?" she asked quickly.

"Back to my father's farm in Graaf-Reinet, to sell the ivory. There are three others besides my father, two Boers and one Englishman."

"And I am going to Natal where you come from," she answered, "so I suppose that after to-night we shall never see each other again, although my life does belong to you—that is if we escape."

Just then the tempest which had lulled a little, came on again in fury, accompanied by a hurricane of wind and deluge of rain, through which the lightning blazed incessantly. The thunderclaps too were so loud and constant that the sound of them, which shook the earth, made it impossible for Richard and Rachel to hear each other speak. So they were silent perforce. Only Richard rose and looked out of the cave, then turned and beckoned to his companion. She came to him and watched, till suddenly a blinding sheet of flame lit up the whole landscape. Then she saw what he was looking at, for now nearly all the island, except that high part of it on which they stood, was under water, hidden by a brown, seething torrent, that tore past them to the sea.

"If it rises much more, we shall be drowned," he shouted in her ear.

She nodded, then cried back:

"Let us say our prayers and get ready," for it seemed to Rachel that the "glory" of which her father spoke so often was nearer to them than ever.

Then she drew him back into the cave and motioned to him to kneel beside her, which he did bashfully enough, and for a while the two children, for they were little more, remained thus with clasped hands and moving lips. Presently the thunder lessened a little so that once more they could hear each other speak.

"What did you pray about?" he asked when they had risen from their knees.

"I prayed that you might escape, and that my mother might not grieve for me too much," she answered simply. "And you?"

"I? Oh! the same—that you might escape. I did not pray for my mother as she is dead, and I forgot about father."

"Look, look!" exclaimed Rachel, pointing to the mouth of the cave.

He stared out at the darkness, and there, through the thin flames of the fire, saw two great yellow shapes which appeared to be walking up and down and glaring into the cave.

"Lions," he gasped, snatching at his gun.

"Don't shoot," she cried, "you might make them angry. Perhaps they only want to take refuge like ourselves. The fire will keep them away."

He nodded, then remembering that the charge and priming of his flint-lock *roer* must be damp, hurriedly set to work by the help of Rachel to draw it with the screw on the end of his ramrod, and this done, to reload with some powder that he had already placed to dry on a flat stone near the fire. This operation took five minutes or more. When at length it was finished,

and the lock reprimed with the dry powder, the two of them, Richard holding the *roer*, crept to the mouth of the cave and looked out again.

The great storm was passing now, and the rain grew thinner, but from time to time the lightning, no longer forked or chain-shaped, flared in wide sheets. By its ghastly illumination they saw a strange sight. There on the island top the two lions marched backwards and forwards as though they were in a cage, making a kind of whimpering noise as they went, and staring round them uneasily. Moreover, these were not alone, for gathered there were various other animals, driven down by the flood from the islands above them, reed and water bucks, and a great eland. Among these the lions walked without making the slightest effort to attack them, nor did the antelopes, which stood sniffing and staring at the torrent, take any notice of the lions, or attempt to escape.

"You are right," said Richard, "they are all frightened, and will not harm us, unless the water rises more, and they rush into the cave. Come, make up the fire."

They did so, and sat down on its further side, watching till, as nothing happened, their dread of the lions passed away, and they began to talk again, telling to each other the stories of their lives.

Richard Darrien, it seemed, had been in Africa about five years, his father having emigrated there on the death of his mother, as he had nothing but the half-pay of a retired naval captain, and he hoped to better his fortunes in a new land. He had been granted a farm in the Graaf-Reinet district, but like many other of the early settlers, met with misfortunes. Now, to make money, he had taken to elephant-hunting, and with his partners was just returning from a very successful expedition in the coast lands of Natal, at that time an almost unexplored territory. His father had allowed Richard to accompany the

"The two of them . . . crept to the mouth of the cave" (*see page 24*).

party, but when they got back, added the boy with sorrow, he was to be sent for two or three years to the college at Cape Town, since until then his father had not been able to afford him the luxury of an education. Afterwards he wished him to adopt a profession, but on this point he—Richard—had made up his mind, although at present he said little about that. He would be a hunter, and nothing else, until he grew too old to hunt, when he intended to take to farming.

His story done, Rachel told him hers, to which he listened eagerly.

"Is your father mad?" he asked when she had finished.

"No," she answered. "How dare you suggest it? He is only very good; much better than anybody else."

"Well, it seems to come to much the same thing, doesn't it?" said Richard, "for otherwise he would not have sent you to gather gooseberries here with such a storm coming on."

"Then why did your father send you to hunt lions with such a storm coming on?" she asked.

"He didn't send me. I came of myself; I said that I wanted to shoot a buck, and finding the spoor of a lion I followed it. The waggons must be a long way ahead now, for when I left them I returned to that kloof where I had seen the buck. I don't know how I shall overtake them again, and certainly nobody will ever think of looking for me here, as after this rain they can't spoor the horse."

"Supposing you don't find it—I mean your horse—to-morrow, what shall you do?" asked Rachel. "We haven't got any to lend you."

"Walk and try to catch them up," he replied.

"And if you can't catch them up?"

"Come back to you, as the wild Kaffirs ahead would kill me if I went on alone."

"Oh! But what would your father think?"

"He would think there was one boy the less, that's all, and be sorry for a while. People often vanish in Africa where there are so many lions and savages."

Rachel reflected a while, then finding the subject difficult, suggested that he should find out what their own particular lions were doing. So Richard went to look and reported that the storm had ceased, and that by the moonlight he could see no lions or any other animals, so he thought that they must have gone away somewhere. The flood waters also appeared to be running down. Comforted by this intelligence Rachel piled on the fire nearly all the wood that remained to them. Then they sat down again side by side, and tried to continue their conversation. By degrees it drooped, however, and the end of it was that presently this pair were fast asleep in each other's arms.

CHAPTER III

GOOD-BYE

RACHEL was the first to wake, which she did, feeling cold, for the fire had burnt almost out. She rose and walked from the cave. The dawn was breaking quietly, for now no wind stirred, and no rain fell. So dense was the mist which rose from the river and sodden land, however, that she could not see two yards in front of her, and fearing lest she should stumble on the lions or some other animals, she did not dare to wander far from the mouth of the cave. Near to it was a large, hollow-surfaced rock, filled now with water like a bath. From this she drank, then washed and tidied herself as well as she could without the aid of soap, comb or towels, which done, she returned to the cave.

As Richard was still sleeping, very quietly she laid a little more wood on the embers to keep him warm, then sat down by his side and watched him, for now the grey light of the dawning crept into their place of refuge. To her this slumbering lad looked beautiful, and as she studied him her childish heart was filled with a strange, new tenderness, such as she had never felt before. Somehow he had grown dear to her, and Rachel knew that she would never forget him while she lived. Then following this wave of affection came a sharp and sudden pain, for she remembered that presently they must part, and never see each other any more. At least this seemed certain, for how could they when he was travelling to the Cape and she to Natal?

And yet, and yet a strange conviction told her otherwise. The power of prescience which came to her from her mother and her Highland forefathers awoke in her breast, and she knew that her life and this lad's life were interwoven. Perhaps she dozed off again, sitting there by the fire. At any rate it appeared to her that she dreamed and saw things in her dream. Wild tumultuous scenes opened themselves before her in a vision; scenes of blood and terror, sounds, too, of voices crying war. It appeared to her as if she were mad and yet ruled a queen, death came near to her a score of times, but always fled away at her command. Now Richard Darrien was with her, and now she had lost him and sought—ah! how she sought through dark places of doom and unnatural night. It was as though he were dead, and she yet living, searched for him among the habitations of the dead. She found him also, and drew him towards her. How, she did not know.

Then there was a scene, a last scene, which remained fixed in her mind after everything else had faded away. She saw the huge trunks of forest trees, enormous, towering trees, gloomy trees beneath which the darkness could be felt. Down their avenues shot the level arrows of the dawn. They fell on her, Rachel, dressed in robes of white skin, turning her long, outspread hair to gold. They fell upon little people with faces of a dusky pallor, one of them crouched against the bole of a tree, a wizened monkey of a man who in all that vastness looked small, small. They fell upon another man, white-skinned, half-naked, with a yellow beard, who was lashed by hide ropes to a second tree. It was Richard Darrien grown older, and at his feet lay a broad-bladed spear!

The vision left her, or she was awakened from her sleep, whichever it might be, by the pleasant voice of this same Richard, who stood yawning before her, and said:

"It is time to get up. I say, why do you look so queer? Are you ill?"

"I have been up, long ago," she answered, struggling to her feet. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing, except that you seemed a ghost a minute ago. Now you are a girl again, it must have been the light."

"Did I? Well I dreamed of ghosts, or something of the sort," and she told him of the vision of the trees, though of the rest she could remember little.

"That's a queer story," he said when she had finished. "I wish you had got to the end of it, I should like to know what happened."

"We shall find out one day," she answered solemnly.

"Do you mean to say that you believe it is true, Rachel?"

"Yes, Richard, one day I shall see you tied to that tree."

"Then I hope you will cut me loose, that is all. What a funny girl you are," he added doubtfully. "I know what it is, you want something to eat. Have the rest of that biltong."

"No," she answered, "I could not touch it. There is a pool of water out there, go and bathe your arm, and I will bind it up again."

He went, still wondering, and a few minutes later returned, his face and head dripping, and whispered:

"Give me the gun. There is a reed buck standing close by, I saw it through the mist, we'll have a jolly breakfast off him."

She handed him the *roer*, and crept after him out of the cave. About thirty yards away to the right, looming very large through the dense fog, stood the fat reed buck. Richard wriggled towards it, for he wanted to make sure of his shot, while Rachel crouched behind a stone. The buck becoming alarmed, turned its head, and began to sniff at the air, whereon he lifted the gun and just as it was about to spring

away, aimed and fired. Down it went dead, whereon, rejoicing in his triumph like any other young hunter who thinks not of the wonderful and happy life that he has destroyed, Richard sprang upon it exultantly, drawing his knife as he came, while Rachel, who always shrank from such sights, retreated to the cave. Half an hour later, however, being healthy and hungry, she had no objection to eating venison toasted upon sticks in the red embers of their fire.

Their meal finished at length, they reloaded the gun, and although the mist was still very dense, set out upon a journey of exploration, as by now the sun was shining brightly above the curtain of low-lying vapour. Stumbling on through the rocks, they discovered that the water had fallen almost as quickly as it rose on the previous night. The island was strewn, however, with the trunks of trees and other débris that it had brought down, amongst which lay the carcases of bucks and smaller creatures, and with them a number of drowned snakes. The two lions, however, appeared to have escaped by swimming, at least they saw nothing of them. Walking cautiously, they came to the edge of the donga, and sat down upon a stone, since as yet they could not see how wide and deep the water ran.

Whilst they remained thus, suddenly through the mist they heard a voice shouting from the other side of the donga.

"Missie," cried the voice in Dutch. "Are you there, Missie?"

"That is Tom, our driver," she said, "come to look for me. Answer for me, Richard."

So the lad, who had very good lungs, roared in reply:

"Yes, I'm here, safe, waiting for the mist to lift, and the water to run down."

"God be thanked," yelled the distant Tom.

"We thought that you were surely drowned. But then why is your voice changed?"

"Because an English heer is with me," cried Rachel. "Go and look for his horse and bring a rope, then wait till the mist rises. Also send to tell the pastor and my mother that I am safe."

"I am here, Rachel," shouted another voice, her father's. "I have been looking for you all night, and we have got the Englishman's horse. Don't come into the water yet. Wait till we can see."

"That's good news any way," said Richard, "though I shall have to ride hard to catch up the waggons."

Rachel's face fell.

"Yes," she said, "very good news."

"Are you glad that I am going, then?" he asked in an offended tone.

"It was you who said the news was good," she replied gently.

"I meant I was glad that they had caught my horse, not that I had to ride away on it. Are you sorry, then?" and he glanced at her anxiously.

"Yes, I am sorry, for we have made friends, haven't we? It won't matter to you who will find plenty of people down there at the Cape, but you see when you are gone, I shall have no friend left in this wilderness, shall I?"

Again Richard looked at her, and saw that her sweet grey eyes were full of tears. Then there rose within the breast of this lad who, be it remembered, was verging upon manhood, a sensation strangely similar, had he but known it, to that which had been experienced an hour or two before by the child at his side when she watched him sleeping in the cave. He felt as though these tear-laden grey eyes were drawing his heart as a magnet draws iron. Of love he knew nothing, it was but a name to him, but this feeling was certainly very new and queer.

"What have you done to me?" he asked brusquely. "I don't want to go away from you at all, which is odd, as I never liked girls much. I tell you," he went on with gathering vehemence, "that if it wasn't that it would be mean to play such a trick upon my father, I wouldn't go. I'd come with you, or follow after—all my life. Answer me—what have you done?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," said Rachel with a little sob, "except tie up your arm."

"That can't be it," he replied, "anyone could tie up my arm. Oh! I know it is wrong, but I hope I shan't be able to overtake the waggons, for if I can't I will come back."

"You mustn't come back, you must go away, quite away, as soon as you can. Yes, as soon as you can, your father will be very anxious," and she began to cry outright.

"Stop it," said Richard. "Do you hear me, stop it. I am not going to be made to snivel too, just because I shan't see a little girl any more whom I never met—till yesterday."

These last words came out with a gulp, and what is more, two tears came with them and trickled down his nose.

For a moment they sat thus looking at each other pitifully, and—the truth must be told—weeping, both of them. Then something got the better of Richard, let us call it primeval instinct, so that he put his arms about Rachel and kissed her, after which they continued to weep, their heads resting upon each other's shoulders. At length he let her go and stood up, saying argumentatively:

"You see now we are really friends."

"Yes," she answered, again rubbing her eyes with the back of her hand for lack of a pocket handkerchief in the fashion that on the previous day had so irritated her father, "but I don't know why you should kiss me like that, just because you are my friend, or," she

added with an outburst of truthfulness, "why I should kiss you."

Richard stood over her frowning and reflecting. Then he gave up the problem as beyond his powers of interpretation, and said:

"You remember that rubbish you dreamt just now, about my being tied to a tree and the rest of it? Well, it wasn't nice, and it gives me the creeps to think of it, like the lions outside the cave. But I want to tell you that I hope it is true, for then we shall meet again, if it is only to say good-night."

"Yes, Richard," she answered, placing her slim fingers into his big brown hand, "we shall meet again, I am sure—I am quite sure. And I think that it will be to say, not good-night," and she looked up at him and smiled, "but good-morning."

As Rachel spoke a puff of wind blew down the donga, rolling up the mist before it, and of a sudden shining above them they saw the glorious sun. As though by magic butterflies appeared basking upon the rain-shattered lily blooms; bright birds flitted from tree to tree, ring-doves began to coo. The terror of the tempest and the darkness of night were overpast; the world awoke again to life and love and joy. Instantly this change reflected itself in their young hearts. They whose natures had as it were ripened prematurely in the stress of danger and the shadow of death, became children once again. The very real emotions that they had experienced were forgotten, or at any rate sank into abeyance. Now they thought, not of separation or of the dim, mysterious future that stretched before them, but only of how they should ford the stream and gain its further side, where Rachel saw her father, Tom, the driver, and the other Kaffirs, and Richard saw his horse which he had feared was lost.

They ran down to the brink of the water and examined it, but here it was still too deep for the

to attempt its crossing. Then, directed by the shouts and motions of the Kaffir Tom and Mr. Dove, they proceeded up stream for several hundred yards, till they came to a rapid where the lessening flood ran thinly over a ridge of rock, and after investigation, proceeded to try its passage hand in hand. It proved difficult but not dangerous, for when they came near to the further side where the current was swift and the water rather deep, Tom threw them a waggon rope, clinging on to which they were dragged—wet, but laughing—in safety to the further bank.

"Ow!" exclaimed the Kaffirs, clapping their hands. "She is alive, the lightnings have turned away from her, she rules the waters and the lightnings!" and then and there, after the native fashion, they gave Rachel a name which was destined to play a great part in her future. That name was "Lady of the Lightnings," or, to translate it more accurately, "of the Heavens."

"I never thought to see you again," said her father, looking at Rachel with a face that was still white and scared. "It was very wrong of me to send you so far with that storm coming on, and I have had a terrible night—yes, a terrible night; and so has your poor mother. However, she knows that you are safe by now, thank God, thank God!" and he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Well, father, you said that He would look after me, didn't you? And so He did, for He sent Richard here. If it hadn't been for Richard I should have been drowned," she added inconsequently.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Dove. "Providence manifests itself in many ways. But who is your young friend whom you call Richard? I suppose he has some other name."

"Of course," answered that youth himself, "everybody has except Kaffirs. Mine is Darrien."

"Darrien?" said Mr. Dove. "I had a friend

called Darrien at school. I never saw him after I left, but I believe that he went into the navy."

"Then he must be my father, sir, for I have heard him say that there had been no other Darrien in the service for a hundred years."

"I think so," answered Mr. Dove, "for now that I look at you, I can see a likeness. We slept side by side in the same dormitory once five-and-thirty years ago, so I remember. And now you have saved my daughter; it is very strange. But tell me the story."

So between them they told it, although to one scene of it—the last—neither of them thought it necessary to allude; or perhaps it was forgotten.

"Truly the Almighty has had you both in His keeping," exclaimed Mr. Dove, when their tale was done. "And now, Richard, my boy, what are you going to do? You see, we caught your horse—it was grazing about a mile away with the saddle twisted under its stomach—and wondered what white man could possibly have been riding it in this desolate place. Afterwards, however, one of my voorloopers reported that he had seen two waggons yesterday afternoon trekking through the poort about five miles to the north there. The white men with them said that they were travelling towards the Cape, and pushing on to get out of the hills before the storm broke. They bade him, if he met you, to bid you follow after them as quickly as you could, and to say that they would wait for you if you did not arrive before, at the Three Sluit outspan on this side of the Pondo country, at which you stopped some months ago."

"Yes," answered Richard, "I remember, but that outspan is thirty miles away, so I must be getting on, or they will come back to hunt for me."

"First you will stop and eat with us, will you not?" said Mr. Dove.

"No, no, I have eaten. Also I have saved some

meat in my pouch. I must go, I must, indeed, for otherwise my father will be angry with me. You see," he added, "I went out shooting without his leave."

"Ah! my boy," remarked Mr. Dove, who seldom neglected an opportunity for a word in season, "now you know what comes of disobedience."

"Yes, I know, sir," he answered looking at Rachel. "I was just in time to save your daughter's life here; as you said just now, Providence sent me. Well, good-bye, and don't think me wicked if I am very glad that I was disobedient, as I believe you are, too."

"Yes, I am. Good comes out of evil, sometimes, though that is no reason that we should do evil," the missionary added, not knowing what else to say.

Richard did not attempt to argue the point, for at the moment he was engaged in bidding farewell to Rachel. It was a very silent farewell; neither of them spoke a word, they only shook each other's hand and looked into each other's eyes. Then muttering something which it was as well that Mr. Dove did not hear, Richard swung himself into the saddle, for his horse stood at hand, and, without even looking back, cantered away towards the mountains.

"Oh!" exclaimed Rachel presently, "call him, father."

"What for?" asked Mr. Dove.

"I want to give him our address, and to get his."

"We have no address, Rachel. Also he is too far off, and why should you want the address of a chance acquaintance?"

"Because he saved my life and I do," replied the child, setting her face. Then, without another word, she turned and began to walk towards their camp—a very heavy journey it was to Rachel.

When Rachel reached the waggon she found that her mother was more or less recovered. At any rate

the attack of fever had left her so that she felt able to rise from her bed. Now, although still weak she was engaged in packing away the garments of her dead baby in a travelling chest, weeping in a silent, piteous manner as she worked. It was a very sad sight. When she saw Rachel she opened her arms without a word, and embraced her.

"You were not frightened about me, mother?" asked the child.

"No, my love," she answered, "because I knew that no harm would come to you. I have always known that. It was a mad thing of your father to send you to such a place at such a time, but no folly of his or of anyone else can hurt you who are destined to live. Never be afraid of anything, Rachel, for remember always you will only die in old age."

"I am not sure that I am glad of that," answered the girl, as she pulled off her wet clothes. "Life isn't a very happy thing, is it, mother, at least for those who live as we do?"

"There is good and bad in it, dear; we can't have one without the other—most of us. At any rate we must take it as it comes, who have to walk a path that we did not make, and stop walking when our path comes to an end, not a step before or after. But, Rachel, you are changed since yesterday. I see it in your face. What has happened to you?"

"Lots of things, mother. I will tell you the story, all of it, every word. Would you like to hear it?"

Her mother nodded, and, the baby-clothes being at last packed away, shut the lid of the box with a sigh, sat down upon it and listened.

Rachel told her of her meeting with Richard Darrien, and of how he saved her from the flood. She told of the strange night that they had spent together in the little cave while the lions marched up and down without. She told of her vigil over the sleeping Richard at the daybreak, and of the dream

that she had dreamed when she seemed to see him grown to manhood, and herself grown to womanhood, and clad in white skins, watching him lashed to the trunk of a gigantic tree as the first arrows of sunrise struck down the lanes of some mysterious forest. She told of how her heart had been stirred, and of how afterwards in the mist by the water's brink his heart had been stirred also, and of how they had kissed each other and wept because they must part.

Then she stopped, expecting that her mother would be angry with her and scold her for her thoughts and conduct, as she knew well her father would have done. But she was not angry, and she did not scold. She only stretched out her thin hands and stroked the child's fair hair, saying:

"Don't be frightened, Rachel, and don't be sad. You think that you have lost him, but soon or late he will come back to you, perhaps as you dreamed—perhaps otherwise."

"If I were sure of that, mother, I would not mind anything," said the girl, "though really I don't know why I should care," she added defiantly.

"No, you don't know now but you will one day, and when you do, remember that however long it seems to wait, you may be quite sure, because I who have the gift of knowing, told you so. Now tell me again what Richard Darrien was like while you remember, for perhaps I may never live to see his face, and I wish to get it into my mind."

So Rachel told her, and when she had described every detail, asked suddenly:

"Must we really go on, mother, into this awful wilderness? Would not father turn back if you asked him?"

"Perhaps," she answered. "But I shall not ask. He would never forgive me for preventing him from doing what he thinks his duty. It is a madness when we might be happy in the Cape, or in England, but

that cannot be helped, for it is also his destiny and ours. Don't judge hardly of your father, Rachel, because he is a saint, and this world is a bad place for saints and their families, especially their families. You think that he does not feel; that he is heartless about me, and the poor babe, and sacrifices us all, but I tell you he feels more than either you or I can do. At night when I pretend to go to sleep, I watch him groaning over his loss and for me, and praying for strength to bear it, and for help to enable him to do his duty. Last night he was nearly crazed about you, and in all that awful storm, when the Kaffirs would not stir from the waggon, went alone down to the river guided by the lightnings, but of course returned half dead, having found nothing. By dawn he was back there again, for love and fear would not let him rest a minute. Yet he will never tell you anything of that, lest you should think that his faith in Providence was shaken. I know that he is strange—it is no use hiding it, but if I were to thwart him he would go quite mad, and then I should never forgive myself, who took him for better and for worse, just as he is, and not as I should like him to be. So, Rachel, be as happy as you can, and make the best of things, as I try to do, for your life is all before you, whereas mine lies behind me, and yonder," and she pointed towards the place where the infant was buried. "Hush! here he comes. Now, help me with the packing, for we are to trek to the ford this afternoon."

CHAPTER IV

ISHMAEL

It may be doubted whether any well-born young English lady ever had a stranger bringing-up than that which fell to the lot of Rachel Dove. To begin with she had absolutely no associates, male or female, of her own age and station, for at that period in its history such people did not exist in the country where she dwelt. Practically her only companions were her father, a religious enthusiast, and her mother, a half broken-hearted woman, who never for a single hour could forget the children she had lost, and whose constitutional mysticism increased upon her continually until at times it seemed as though she had added some new quality to her normal human nature.

Then there were the natives amongst whom from the beginning Rachel was a sort of queen. In those first days of settlement they had never seen anybody in the least like her, no one so beautiful—for she grew up beautiful—so fearless, or so kind. The tale of that adventure of hers as a child upon the island in the midst of the flooded torrent, spread all through the country with many fabulous additions. Thus the Kaffirs said that she was a "Heaven-herd," that is, a magical person who can ward off or direct the lightnings, which she was supposed to have done upon this night; also that she could walk upon the waters, for otherwise how did she escape the flood? And lastly, that the wild beasts were her servants, for had not the driver Tom and the natives seen the spoor of

great lions right at the mouth of the cave where she and her companion sheltered, and had they not heard, that she called these lions into the cave to protect her and him from the other creatures? Therefore, as has been said, they gave her a name, a very long name that meant Chieftainess or Lady of Heaven, *Inkosazana-y-Zoola;* for Zulu or Zoola, which we know as the title of that people, means Heaven, and *Udade-y-Silwana* or Sister of wild beasts. As these appellations proved too lengthy for general use, even among the Bantu races who have plenty of time for talking, ultimately it was shortened to Zoola alone, so that throughout that part of South Eastern Africa Rachel came to enjoy the lofty title of "Heaven," the first girl, probably, who was ever so called.

With all natives from her childhood up, Rachel was on the best of terms. She was never familiar with them indeed, for that is not the way for a white person to win the affection, or even the respect of a Kaffir. But she was intimate in the sense that she could enter into their thoughts and nature, a very rare gift. We whites are apt to consider ourselves the superior of such folk, whereas we are only different. In fact, taken altogether it is quite a question whether the higher sections of the Bantu peoples are not our equals. Of course we have learned more things and our best men are their betters. But on the other hand among them there is nothing so low as the inhabitants of our slums, nor have they any vices which can surpass our vices. Is an assegai so much more savage than a shell? Is there any great gulf fixed between a Chaka and a Napoleon? At least they are not hypocrites, and they are not vulgar; that is the privilege of civilised nations.

Well, with these folk Rachel was intimate. She could talk to the warrior of his wars, to the woman of her garden and her children, to the children of that wonder world which surrounds childhood through-

out the universe. And yet there was never a one of these but lifted the hand to her in salute when her shadow fell upon them. To them all she was the Inkosazana, the Great Lady. They would laugh at her father and mimic him behind his back, but Rachel they never laughed at or mimicked. Of her mother also, although she kept herself apart from them, much the same may be said. For her they had a curious name which they would not, or were unable to explain. They called her "Flower-that-grows-on-a-grave." For Mr. Dove their appellation was less poetical. It was "Shouter-about-Things-he-does-not-understand," or more briefly, "The Shouter," a name that he had acquired from his habit of raising his voice when he grew moved in speaking to them. The things that he did not understand, it may be explained, were not to their minds his religious views, which although they considered them remarkable, were evidently his own affair, but their private customs. Especially their family customs that he was never weary of denouncing to the bewilderment of these poor heathens, who for their part were not greatly impressed by those of the few white people with whom they came in contact. Therefore, with native politeness, they concluded that he spoke thus rudely because he did not understand. Hence his name.

But Rachel had other friends. In truth she was Nature's child, if in a better and a purer sense than Byron uses that description. The sea, the veld, the sky, the forest and the river, these were her companions, for among them she dwelt solitary. Their denizens, too, knew her well, for unless she were driven to it, never would she lift her hand against anything that drew the breath of life. The buck would let her pass quite close to them, nor at her coming did the birds stir from off their trees. Often she stood and watched the great elephants feeding or at rest, and even dared to wander among the herds of savage buffalo. Of

only two living things was she afraid—the snake and the crocodile, that are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field, because being cursed they have no sympathy or gentleness. She feared nothing else, she who was always fearless, nor brute or bird, did they fear her.

After Rachel's adventure in the flooded river she and her parents pursued their journey by slow and tedious marches, and at length, though in those days this was strange enough, reached Natal unharmed. At first they went to live where the city of Durban now stands, which at that time had but just received its name. It was inhabited by a few rough men who made a living by trading and hunting, and surrounded themselves with natives, refugees for the most part from the Zulu country. Amongst these people and their servants Mr. Dove commenced his labours, but ere long a bitter quarrel grew up between him and them.

These dwellers in the midst of barbarism led strange lives, and Mr. Dove, who rightly held it to be his duty to denounce wrong-doing of every sort, attacked them and their vices in no measured terms, and upon all occasions. For long years he kept up the fight, until at length he found himself ostracised. If they could avoid it, no white men would speak to him, nor would they allow him to instruct their Kaffirs. Thus his work came to an end in Durban as it had done in other places. Now again his wife and daughter hoped that he would leave South Africa for good, and return home. But it was not to be, for once more he announced that it was laid upon him to follow the example of his divine Master, and that the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. So, with a few attendants, they trekked away from Durban.

On this occasion it was his wild design to settle in Zululand—where Chaka, the great king, being dead,

Dingaan, his brother and murderer, ruled in his place —and there devote himself to the conversion of the Zulus. Indeed it is probable that he would have carried out this plan had he not been prevented by an accident. One night when they were about forty miles from Durban they camped on a stream, a tributary of the Tugela River, which ran close by, and formed the boundary of the Zulu country. It was a singularly beautiful spot, for to the east of them, about a mile away, stretched the placid Indian Ocean, while to the west, overshadowing them almost, rose a towering cliff, over which the stream poured itself, looking like a line of smoke against its rocky face. They had outspanned upon a rising hillock at the foot of which this little river wound away like a silver snake till it joined the great Tugela. In its general aspect the country was like an English park, dotted here and there with timber, around which grazed or rested great elands and other buck, and amongst them a huge rhinoceros.

When the waggon had creaked to the top of the rise, for of course there was no road, and the Kaffirs were beginning to unyoke the hungry oxen, Rachel, who was riding with her father, sprang from her horse and ran to it to help her mother to descend. She was now a tall young woman, full of health and vigour, strong and straightly shaped. Mrs. Dove, frail, delicate, grey-haired, placed her foot upon the dissel-boom and hesitated, for to her the ground seemed far off, and the heels of the cattle very near.

"Jump," said Rachel in her clear, laughing voice, as she smacked the near after-ox to make it turn round, which it did obediently, for all the team knew her. "I'll catch you."

But her mother still hesitated, so thrusting her way between the ox and the front wheel Rachel stretched out her arms and lifted her bodily to the ground.

"How strong you are, my love!" said her mother, with a sort of wondering admiration and a sad little smile; "it seems strange to think that I ever carried you."

"One had need to be in this country, dear," replied Rachel cheerfully. "Come and walk a little way, you must be stiff with sitting in that horrid waggon," and she led her quite to the top of the knoll. "There," she added, "isn't the view lovely? I never saw such a pretty place in all Africa. And oh! look at those buck, and yes—that is a rhinoceros. I hope it won't charge us."

Mrs. Dove obeyed, gazing first at the glorious sea, then at the plain and the trees, and lastly behind her at the towering cliff steeped in shadow—for the sun was westering—down the face of which the waterfall seemed to hang like a silver rope.

As her eyes fell upon this cliff Mrs. Dove's face changed.

"I know this spot," she said in a hurried voice. "I have seen it before."

"Nonsense, mother," answered Rachel. "We have never trekked here, so how could you?"

"I can't say, love, but I have. I remember that cliff and the waterfall; yes, and those three trees, and the buck standing under them."

"One often feels like that, about having seen places, I mean, mother, but of course it is all nonsense, because it is impossible, unless one dreams of them first."

"Yes, love, unless one dreams. Well, I think that I must have dreamt. What was the dream now? Rachel weeping—Rachel weeping—my love, I think that we are going to live here, and I think—I think——"

"All right," broke in her daughter quickly, with a shade of anxiety in her voice as though she did not wish to learn what her mother thought. "I don't mind, I am sure. I don't want to go to Zululand, and

see this horrid Dingaan, who is always killing people, and I am quite sure that father would never convert him, the wicked monster. It is like the Garden of Eden, isn't it, with the sea thrown in. There are all the animals, and that green tree with the fruit on it might be the Tree of Life, and—oh; my goodness, there is Adam!"

Mrs. Dove followed the line of her daughter's outstretched hand, and perceived three or four hundred yards away, as in that sparkling atmosphere it was easy to do, a white man apparently clad in skins. He was engaged in crawling up a little rise of ground with the obvious intention of shooting at some blesbuck which stood in a hollow beyond with quaggas and other animals, while behind him was a mounted Kaffir who held his master's horse.

"I see," said Mrs. Dove, mildly interested. "But he looks more like Robinson Crusoe without his umbrella. Adam did not kill the animals in the Garden, my dear."

"He must have lived on something besides forbidden apples," remarked Rachel, "unless perhaps he was a vegetarian as father wants to be. There—he has fired!"

As she spoke a cloud of smoke arose above the man, and presently the loud report of a *roer* reached their ears. One of the buck rolled over and lay struggling on the ground, while the rest, together with many others at a distance, turned and galloped off this way and that, frightened by this new and terrible noise. The old rhinoceros under the tree rose snorting, sniffed the air, then thundered away up wind towards the man, its pig-like tail held straight above its back.

"Adam has spoilt our Eden; I hope the rhinoceros will catch him," said Rachel viciously. "Look, he has seen it and he is running to his horse."

Rachel was right. Adam—or whatever his name

might be—was running with remarkable swiftness. Reaching the horse just as the rhinoceros appeared within forty yards of him, he bounded to the saddle and with his servant galloped off to the right. The rhinoceros came to a standstill for a few moments as though it were wondering whether it dared attack these strange creatures, then making up its mind in the negative, rushed on and vanished. When it was gone the white man and the Kaffir, who had pulled up their horses at a distance, returned to the fallen buck, cut its throat and lifted it on to the Kaffir's horse, then rode slowly towards the waggon.

"They are coming to call," said Rachel. "How should one receive a gentleman in skins?"

Apparently some misgivings as to the effect that might be produced by his appearance occurred to the hunter. At any rate, he looked first at the two white women standing on the brow, and next at his own peculiar attire which appeared to consist chiefly of the pelt of a lion, plus a very striking pair of trousers manufactured from the hide of a zebra, and halted about sixty yards away, staring at them. Rachel, whose sight was exceedingly keen, could see his face well, for the light of the setting sun fell on it and he wore no head covering. It was a dark, handsome face of a man of about thirty-five years of age, with strongly-marked features, black eyes and beard, and long black hair that fell down on to his shoulders. They gazed at each other for a while, then the man turned to his after-rider, gave him an order in a clear, strong voice, and rode away inland. The after-rider, on the contrary, directed his horse up the rise until he was within a few yards of them, then sprang to the ground and saluted.

"What is it?" asked Rachel in Zulu, a language which she now spoke perfectly.

"Inkosikaas" (that is—Lady), answered the man, "my master thinks that you may be hungry and sends

you a present of this buck," and, as he spoke, he loosed the riem or hide rope by which it was fastened behind his saddle, and let the animal fall to the ground.

Rachel turned her eyes from it for it was covered with blood, and unpleasant to look at, then replied:

"My father and my mother thank your master. How is he named, and where does he dwell?"

"Lady, among us black people he is named Ibubesi (lion), but his white name is Hishmel."

"Hishmel, Hishmel?" said Rachel. "Oh! I know, he means Ishmael. There, mother, I told you he was something biblical, and of course Ishmael dwelt in the wilderness, didn't he, after his father had behaved so badly to poor Hagar, and was a wild man whose hand was against every man's."

"Rachel, Rachel," said her mother suppressing a little smile. "Your father would be very angry if he heard you. You should not speak lightly of holy persons."

"Well, mother, Abraham may have been a holy person, but we should think him a mean old thing nowadays, almost as mean as Sarah. You know they were most of them mean, so what is the use of pretending they were not?"

Then without waiting for an answer she asked the Kaffir again: "Where does the Inkoos Ishmael dwell?"

"In the wilderness," answered the man appropriately. "Now his kraal is yonder, two hours' ride away. It is called Mafooti," and he pointed over the top of the precipice, adding: "he is a hunter, and trades with the Zulus."

"Is he Dutch?" asked Rachel, whose curiosity was excited.

The Kaffir shook his head. "No, he hates the Dutch, he is of the people of George."

"The people of George? Why he must mean a subject of King George—an Englishman."

"Yes, yes, Lady, an Englishman, like you," and he grinned at her. "Have you any message for the Inkoos Hishmel?"

"Yes. Say to the Inkoos Ishmael or Lion-who-dwells-in-the-wilderness, hates the Dutch and wears zebra-skin trousers, that my father and my mother thank him very much for his present, and hope that his health is good. Go. That is all."

The man grinned again, suspecting a joke, for the Zulus have a sense of humour, then repeated the message word for word, trying to pronounce Ishmael as Rachel did, saluted, mounted his horse and galloped off after his master.

"Perhaps you should have kept that Kaffir until your father came," suggested Mrs. Dove doubtfully.

"What was the good?" said Rachel. "He would only have asked Mr. Ishmael to call in order that he might find out his religious opinions, and I don't want to see any more of the man."

"Why not, Rachel?"

"Because I don't like him, mother. I think he is worse than any of the rest down there, too bad to stop among them probably, and—" she added with conviction, "I think we shall have more of his company than we want before all is done. Oh! it is no good to say that I am prejudiced—I do, and what is more, he came into our Garden of Eden and shot the buck. I hope he will meet that rhinoceros on the way home. There!"

Although she disapproved, or tried to think that she did, of such strong opinions so strongly expressed, Mrs. Dove offered no further opposition to them. The fact was that her daughter's bodily and mental vigour overshadowed her, as they did her husband also. Indeed, it seemed curious that this girl, so powerful in body and in mind, should have sprung from such a pair, a wrong-headed, narrow-viewed saint whose right place in the world would have been a cell in the

monastery of one of the stricter orders, and a gentle, uncomplaining, high-bred woman with a mind distinguished by its affectionate and mystical nature, a mind so unusual and refined that it seemed to be, and in truth was, open to influences whereof, mercifully enough, the majority of us never feel the subtle, secret power.

Of her father there was absolutely no trace in Rachel, except a certain physical resemblance —so far as he was concerned she must have thrown back to some earlier progenitor. Even their intellects and moral outlook were quite different. She had, it is true, something of his scholarly power; thus, notwithstanding her wild upbringing, as has been said, she could read the Greek Testament almost as well as he could, or even Homer, which she liked because the old, bloodthirsty heroes reminded her of the Zulus. He had taught her this and other knowledge, and she was an apt pupil. But there the resemblance stopped. Whereas his intelligence was narrow and enslaved by the priestly tradition, hers was wide and human. She searched and she criticised; she believed in God as he did, but she saw His purpose working in the evil as in the good. In her own thought she often compared these forces to the Day and the Night, and believed both of them to be necessary to the human world. For her, savagery had virtues as well as civilisation, although it is true of the latter she knew but little.

From her mother Rachel had inherited more, for instance her grace of speech and bearing, and her intuition, or foresight. Only in her case this curious gift did not dominate her, her other forces held it in check. She felt and she knew, but feeling and knowledge did not frighten or make her weak, any more than the strength of her frame or of her spirit made her unwomanly. She accepted these things as part of her mental equipment, that was all, being

aware that to her a door was opened which is shut firmly enough in the faces of most folk, but not on that account in the least afraid of looking through it as her mother was.

Thus when she saw the man called Ishmael, she knew well enough that he was destined to bring great evil upon her and hers, as when as a child she met the boy Richard Darrien, she had known other things. But she did not, therefore, fear the man and his attendant evil. She only shrank from the first and looked through the second, onward and outward to the ultimate good which she was convinced lay at the end of everything, and meanwhile, being young and merry, she found his zebra-skin trousers very ridiculous.

Just as Rachel and her mother finished their conversation about Mr. Ishmael, Mr. Dove arrived from a little kloof, where he had been engaged with the Kaffirs in cutting bushes to make a thorn fence round their camp as a protection against lions and hyenas. He looked older than when we last met him, and save for a fringe of white hair, which increased his monkish appearance, was quite bald. His face, too, was even thinner and more eager, and his grey eyes were more far-away than formerly; also he had grown a long white beard.

"Where did that buck come from?" he asked, looking at the dead creature.

Rachel told him the story with the result that, as her mother had expected, he was very indignant with her. It was most unkind, and indeed, un-Christian, he said, not to have asked this very courteous gentleman into the camp, as he would much have liked to converse with him. He had often reproved her habit of judging by externals, and in the veld, lion and zebra skins furnished a very suitable covering. She should remember that such were given to our first parents.

"Oh! I know, father," broke in Rachel, "when the climate grew too cold for leaf petticoats and the rest. Now don't begin to scold me, because I must go to cook the dinner. I didn't like the look of the man, besides, he rode off. Then it wasn't my business to ask him here, but mother's, who stood staring at him and never said a single word. If you want to see him so much, you can go to call upon him to-morrow, only don't take me, please. And now will you send Tom to skin the buck?"

Mr. Dove answered that Tom was busy with the fence, and, ceasing from argument which he felt to be useless with Rachel, suggested doubtfully that he had better be his own butcher.

"No, no," she replied, "you know you hate that sort of thing, as I do. Let it be till the Kaffirs have time. We have the cold meat left for supper, and I will boil some mealies. Go and help with the fence, father, while I light the fire."

Usually Rachel was the best of sleepers. So soon as she laid her head upon whatever happened to serve her for a pillow, generally it was a saddle, her eyes shut to open no more till daylight came. On this night, however, it was not so. She had her bed in a little flap tent which hooked on to the side of the waggon that was occupied by her parents. Here she lay wide awake for a long while, listening to the Kaffirs who, having partaken heartily of the buck, were now making themselves drunk by smoking *dakka*, or Indian hemp, a habit of which Mr. Dove had tried in vain to break them. At length the fire around which they sat near the thorn fence on the further side of the waggon, grew low, and their incoherent talk ended in silence, punctuated by snores. Rachel began to doze, but was awakened by the laughing cries of hyenas quite close to her. The brutes had scented the dead buck and were wandering round the fence in the hope of a midnight meal. Rachel

rose, and taking the gun that lay at her side, threw a cloak over her shoulders and left the tent.

The moon was shining brightly and by its light she saw the hyenas, two of them, wolves as they are called in South Africa, long grey creatures that prowled round the thorn fence hungrily, causing the oxen that were tied to the trek tow and the horses picketed on the other side of the waggon, to low and whinny in an uneasy fashion. The hyenas saw her also, for her head rose above the rough fence, and being cowardly beasts, slunk away. She could have shot them if she chose, but did not, first because she hated killing anything unnecessarily, even a wolf, and secondly because it would have aroused the camp. So she contented herself with throwing more dry wood on to the fire, stepping over the Kaffirs, who slept like logs, in order to do so. Then, resting upon her gun like some Amazon on guard, she gazed a while at the lovely moonlit sea, and the long line of game trekking silently to their drinking place, until seeing no more of the wolves or other dangerous beasts, she turned and sought her bed again.

She was thinking of Mr. Ishmael and his zebra-skin trousers; wondering why the man should have filled her with such an unreasoning dislike. If she had disliked him at a distance of fifty paces, how she would hate him when he was near! And yet he was probably only one of those broken soldiers of fortune of whom she had met several, who took to the wilderness as a last resource, and by degrees sank to the level of the savages among whom they lived, a person who was not worth a second thought. So she tried to put him from her mind, and by way of an antidote, since still she could not sleep, filled it with her recollections of Richard Darrien. Some years had gone by since they had met, and from that time to this she had never heard a word of him in which she could put the slightest faith. She did not even know

whether he were alive or dead, only she believed that if he were dead she would be aware of it. No, she had never heard of him, and it seemed probable that she never would hear of him again. Yet she did not believe that either. Had she done so her happiness—for on the whole Rachel was a happy girl—would have departed from her, since this once-seen lad never left her heart, nor had she forgotten their farewell kiss.

Reflecting thus, at length Rachel fell off to sleep and began to dream, still of Richard Darrien. It was a long dream whereof afterwards she could remember but little, but in it there were shoutings, and black faces, and the flashing of spears; also the white man Ishmael was present there. One part, however, she did remember; Richard Darrien, grown taller, changed and yet the same, leaning over her, warning her of danger to come, warning her against this man Ishmael.

She awoke suddenly to see that the light of dawn was creeping into her tent, that low, soft light which is so beautiful in Southern Africa. Rachel was disturbed, she felt the need of action, of anything that would change the current of her thoughts. No one was about yet. What should she do? She knew; the sea was not more than a mile away, she would go down to it and bathe, and be back before the rest of them were awake.

CHAPTER V

NOIE

THAT a girl should set out alone to bathe through a country inhabited chiefly by wild beasts and a few wandering savages, sounds a somewhat dangerous form of amusement. So it was indeed, but Rachel cared nothing for such dangers, in fact she never even thought of them. Long ago she had discovered that the animals would not harm her if she did not harm them, except perhaps the rhinoceros, which is given to charging on sight, and that was large and could generally be discovered at a distance. As for elephants and lions, or even buffalo, her experience was that they ran away, except on rare occasions when they stood still, and stared at her. Nor was she afraid of the savages who always treated her with the utmost respect, even if they had never seen her before. Still, in case of accidents she took her double-barrelled gun, loaded in one barrel with ball, and in the other with loopers or slugs, and awakened Tom, the driver, to tell him where she was going. The man stared at her sleepily, and murmured a remonstrance, but taking no heed of him she pulled out some thorns from the fence to make a passage, and in another minute was lost to sight in the morning mist.

Following a game-path through the dew-drenched grass which grew upon the swells and valleys of the veld, and passing many small buck upon her way, in about twenty minutes, just as the light was really beginning to grow, Rachel reached the sea. It was

dead calm, and the tide chancing to be out, soon she found the very place she sought—a large, rock-bound pool where there would be no fear of sharks that never stay in such a spot, fearing lest they should be stranded. Slipping off her clothes she plunged into the cool and crystal water and began to swim round and across the pool, for at this art she was expert, diving and playing like a sea-nymph. Her bath done she dried herself with a towel she had brought, all except her long, fair hair, which she left loose for the wind to blow on, and having dressed, stood a while waiting to see the glory of the sun rising from the ocean.

Whilst she remained thus, suddenly she heard the sound of horses galloping towards her, two of them, she could tell that from the hoof beats, although the low-lying mists made them invisible. A few more seconds and they emerged out of the fog. The first thing that she saw were stripes which caused her to laugh, thinking that she had mistaken zebras for horses. Then the laugh died on her lips as she recognised that the stripes were those of Mr. Ishmael's trousers. Yes, there was no doubt about it, Mr. Ishmael, wearing a rough coat instead of his lion-skin, but with the rest of his attire unchanged, was galloping down upon her furiously, leading a riderless horse. Remembering her wet and dishevelled hair, Rachel threw the towel over it, whence it hung like an old Egyptian head-dress, setting her beautiful face in a most becoming frame. Next she picked up the double-barrelled gun and cocked it, for she mis-doubted her of this man's intentions. Not many modern books came her way, but she had read stories of young women who were carried off by force.

For an instant she was frightened, but as she lifted the hammer of the second barrel her constitutional courage returned.

"Let him try it," she thought to herself. "If

he had come ten minutes ago it would have been awful, but now I don't care."

By this time Mr. Ishmael had arrived, and was dragging his horse to its haunches; also she saw that evidently he was much more frightened than she had been. The man's handsome face was quite white, and his lips were trembling. "Perhaps that rhinoceros is after him again," thought Rachel, then added aloud quietly:

"What is the matter?"

"Forgive me," he answered in a rich, and, to Rachel's astonishment, perfectly educated voice, "forgive me for disturbing you. I am ashamed, but it is necessary. The Zulus—" and he paused.

"Well, sir," asked Rachel, "what about the Zulus?"

"A regiment of them are coming down here on the war-path. They are hunting fugitives. The fugitives, about fifty of them, passed my camp over an hour ago, and I saw the Impi following them. I rode to warn you all. They told me you were down by the sea. I came to bring you back to your waggon lest you should be cut off."

"Thank you very much," said Rachel. "But I am not afraid of the Zulus. I do not think that they will hurt me."

"Not hurt you! Not hurt you! White and beautiful as you are. Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know," she replied with a laugh, "but you see I am called Inkosazana-y-Zoola. They won't touch one with that name."

"Inkosazana-y-Zoola," he repeated astonished. "Why, she is their Spirit, yes, and I remember—white like you, so they say. How did you get that name? But mount, mount! They will kill you first, and ask how you were called afterwards. Your father is much afraid."

"My mother would not be afraid; she knows,"

muttered Rachel to herself, as she sprang to the saddle of the led horse.

Then, without more words, they began to gallop back towards the camp. Before they reached the crest of the second rise the sun shone out in earnest, thinning the seaward mist, although between them and the camp it still hung thick. Then suddenly in the fog-edge Rachel saw this sight: Towards them ran a delicately shaped and beautiful native girl, naked except for her moocha, and of a very light, copper colour, whilst after her, brandishing an assegai, came a Zulu warrior. Evidently the girl was in the last stage of exhaustion; indeed she reeled over the ground, her tongue protruded from her lips and her eyes seemed to be starting from her head.

"Come on," shouted the man called Ishmael. "It is only one of the fugitives whom they are killing."

But Rachel did nothing of the sort; she pulled up her horse and waited. The girl caught sight of her and with a wild, hoarse scream, redoubled her efforts, so that her pursuer, who had been quite close, was left behind. She reached Rachel and flung her arms about her legs gasping:

"Save me, white lady, save me!"

"Shoot her if she won't leave go," shouted Ishmael, "and come on."

But Rachel only sprang from the horse and stood face to face with the advancing Zulu.

"Stand," she said, and the man stopped.

"Now," she asked, "what do you want with this woman?"

"To take her or to kill her," gasped the soldier.

"By whose order?"

"By order of Dingaan the king."

"For what crime?"

"Witchcraft; but who are you who question me, white woman?"

"One whom you must obey," answered Rachel

proudly. "Go back and leave the girl. She is mine."

The man stared at her, then laughed aloud and began to advance again.

"Go back," repeated Rachel.

He took no heed but still came on.

"Go back or die," she said for the third time.

"I shall certainly die if I go back to Dingaan without the girl," replied the soldier who was a bold-looking savage. "Now you, Noie, will you return with me, or shall I kill you? Say, witch," and he lifted his assegai.

The girl sank in a heap upon the veld. "Kill," she murmured faintly, "I will not go back. I did not bewitch him to make him dream of me, and I will be Death's wife, not his; a ghost in his kraal, not a woman."

"Good," said the man, "I will carry your word to the king. Farewell, Noie," and he raised the assegai still higher, adding: "Stand aside, white woman, for I have no order to kill you also."

By way of answer Rachel put the gun to her shoulder and pointed it at him.

"Are you mad?" shouted Ishmael. "If you touch him they will murder every one of us. Are you mad?"

"Are you a coward?" she asked quietly, without taking her eyes off the soldier. Then she said in Zulu, "Listen. The land on this side of the Tugela has been given by Dingaan to the English. Here he has no right to kill. This girl is mine, not his. Come one step nearer and you die."

"We shall soon see who will die," answered the warrior with a laugh, and he sprang forward.

They were his last words. Rachel aimed and pressed the trigger, the gun exploded heavily in the mist; the Zulu leapt into the air and fell upon his back, dead. The white man, Ishmael, rode to

them, pulled up his horse and sat still, staring. It was a strange picture in that lonely, silent spot. The soldier so very still and dead, his face hidden by the shield that had fallen across it; the tall, white girl, rigid as a statue, in whose hand the gun still smoked, the delicate, fragile Kaffir maiden kneeling on the veld, and looking at her wildly as though she were a spirit, and the two horses, one with its ears pricked in curiosity, and the other already cropping grass.

"My God! What have you done?" exclaimed Ishmael.

"Justice," answered Rachel.

"Then your blood be on your own head. I am not going to stop here to have my throat cut."

"Don't," answered Rachel. "I have a better guardian than you, and will look after my own blood."

To this speech the white man seemed to be able to find no answer. Turning his horse he galloped off swearing, but not towards the camp, whereon the other horse galloped after him, and presently they all vanished in the mist, leaving the two women alone.

At this moment from the direction of the waggon they heard the sound of shouting and of screams, which appeared to come from the valley between them and it.

"The king's men are killing my people," muttered the girl Noie. "Go, or they will kill you too."

Rachel thought a moment. Evidently it was impossible to get through to the camp; indeed, even had they tried to do so on the horses they would have been cut off. An idea came to her. They stood upon the edge of a steep, bush-clothed kloof, where in the wet season a stream ran down to the sea. This stream was now represented by a chain of deep and muddy pools, one of which pools lay directly underneath them.

"Help me to throw him into the water," said Rachel.

"The Zulu leapt into the air"
(*see page 59*).

The girl understood, and with desperate energy they seized the dead soldier, dragged him to the edge of the little cliff and thrust him over. He fell with a heavy splash into the pool and vanished.

"Crocodiles live there," said Rachel, "I saw one as I passed. Now take the shield and spear and follow me."

She obeyed, for with hope her strength seemed to have returned to her, and the two of them scrambled down the cliffs into the kloof. As they reached the edge of the pool they saw great snouts and a disturbance in the water. Rachel was right, crocodiles lived there.

"Now," she said, "throw your moocha on that rock. They will find it and think——"

Noie nodded and did so, rending its fastening and wetting it in the water. Then quite naked she took Rachel's hand and swiftly, swiftly, the two of them leapt from stone to stone, so as to leave no footprints, heading for the sea. Only the fugitive stopped once to drink of the fresh water, for she was perishing with thirst. Now when Rachel was bathing she had observed upon the farther side of her pool and opening out of it, as it were, a little pocket in the rock, where the water was not more than three feet deep and covered by a dense growth of beautiful seaweed, some black and some ribbon-like and yellow. The pool was long, perhaps two hundred paces in all, and to go round it they would be obliged to expose themselves upon the sand, and thus become visible from a long way off.

"Can you swim?" said Rachel to Noie.

Again she nodded, and the two of them slipped into the water and swam across the pool till they reached the pocket-like place on the edge of which they sat down, covering themselves with the seaweed.

They had not been there five minutes when they heard the sound of voices drawing near down the

kloof, and at once slid into the water, covering themselves in it in such fashion that only their heads remained above the surface, mixed with the black and yellow seaweed, so that without close search none could have said which was hair and which was weed.

"The Zulus," said Noie, shivering so that the water shook about her, "they seek me."

"Lie still, then," answered Rachel. "I can't shoot now, the gun is wet."

The voices died away, and the two girls thought that the speakers had gone, but rendered cautious, still remained hidden in the water. It was well for them that they did so for presently they heard the voices again and much nearer. The Zulus were walking round the pool. Two of them came quite close to their little hiding-place, and sat down on some rocks to rest, and talk. Peeping through her covering of seaweed Rachel could see them, great men who held red spears in their hands.

"You are a fool," said one of them to the other, "and have given us this walk for nothing, as though our feet were not sore enough already. The crocodiles have that Noie, her witchcraft could not save her from them; it was a baboon's spoor you saw in the mud, not a woman's."

"It would seem so, brother," answered the other, "as we found the moocha. Still, if so, where is Bomba who was running her down? And what made that blood-mark on the grass?"

"Doubtless," replied the first man, "Bomba came up with her there and wounded her, whereon being a woman and a coward, she ran from him and jumped into the pool in which the crocodiles finished her. As for Bomba, I expect that he has gone back to Zululand, or is asleep somewhere resting. The other spoor we saw was that of a white woman, who puts skins upon her feet. There is a camp of them up yonder, but you remember, our orders were not

to touch any of the people of George, so we need not trouble about them."

"Well, brother, if you are sure, we had better be starting back, lest there should be trouble with the white people. Dingaan will be satisfied when we show him the moocha, and sleep in peace henceforth. She must really have been *tagati* (uncanny), that little Noie, for otherwise, although it is true she was pretty, why should Dingaan who has all Zululand to choose from, have fallen in love with her, and why should she have refused to enter his house, and persuaded all her kraal to run away? For my part, I don't believe that she is dead now, notwithstanding the moocha. I think that she is a witch, and has changed into something else—a bird or a snake, perhaps. Well, the rest of them will never change into anything, except black mould. Let us see. We have killed every one; all the common people, the mother of Noie, the dwarf-wizard Seyapi her father, and her other mothers, four of them, and her brothers and sisters, twelve in all."

At these words Noie again trembled beneath her seaweed, so that the water shook all about her.

"There is a fish there," said the first Kaffir, "I saw it rise. It is a small pool, shall we try to catch it?"

"No, brother," answered the other, "only coast people eat fish. I am hungry, but I will wait for man's food. Take that, fish!" and he threw a stone into the pool which struck Rachel on the side, and caused her fair hair to float about among the yellow seaweed.

Then the two of them got up and went away, walking arm-in-arm like friends and amiable men, as they were in their own fashion.

For a long time the girls remained beneath their seaweed, fearing lest the men or others should return, until at length they could bear the cold of the water

no longer, and crept out of it to the brink of the little pool, where, still wreathed in seaweed, they sat and warmed themselves in the hot sunlight. Now Noie seemed to be half dead; indeed Rachel thought that she would die.

"Awake," she said, "life is still before you."

"Would that it were behind me, Lady," moaned the poor girl. "You understand our tongue—did you not hear? My father, my own mother, my other mothers, my brothers and sisters, all killed, all killed for my sake, and I left living. Oh! you meant kindly, but why did you not let Bomba pass his spear through me? It would have been quickly over, and now I should sleep with the rest."

Rachel made no answer, for she saw that talking was useless in such a case. Only she took Noie's hand and pressed it in silent sympathy, until at length the poor girl, utterly outworn with agony and the fatigue of her long flight, fell asleep, there in the sunshine. Rachel let her sleep, knowing that she would take no harm in that warmth. Quietly she sat at her side for hour after hour while the fierce sun, from which she protected her head with seaweed, dried her garments. At length the shadows told her that midday was past, and the sea water which began to trickle over the surrounding rocks that the tide was approaching its full. They could stop there no longer unless they wished to be drowned.

"Come," she said to Noie, "the Zulus have gone, and the sea is here. We must swim to the shore and go back to my father's camp."

"What place have I in your kraal, Lady?" asked the girl when her senses had returned to her.

"I will find you a place," Rachel answered; "you are mine now."

"Yes, Lady, that is true," said Noie heavily, "I am yours and no one else's," and taking Rachel's hand she pressed it to her forehead.

Then together once more they swam the pool, and not too soon, for the tide was pouring into it. Reaching the shore in safety, no easy task for Rachel, who must hold the heavy gun above her head, Noie tied Rachel's towel about her middle to take the place of her moocha, and very cautiously they crept up the kloof, fearing lest some of the Zulus might still be lurking in the neighbourhood.

At length they came to the pool into which they had thrown the soldier Bomba, and saw two crocodiles, doubtless those that had eaten him, lying asleep in the sun upon flat rocks at its edge. Here they were obliged to leave the kloof both because they feared to pass the crocodiles, and for the reason that their road to the camp ran another way. So they climbed up the cliff and looked about, but could see only a pair of oribe buck, one lying down under a tree, and one eating grass quite close to its mate.

"The Zulus have gone or there would be no buck here," said Rachel. "Come, now, hold the shield before you and the spear in your hand, to hide that you are a woman, and let us go on boldly."

So they went till they reached the crest of the next rise, and then sprang back behind it, for lying here and there they saw people who seemed to be asleep.

"The Zulus resting!" exclaimed Rachel.

"Nay," answered the girl with a sigh. "My people, dead! See the vultures gathered round them."

Rachel looked again, and saw that it was so. Without a word they walked forward, and as they passed each body Noie gave it its name. Here lay a brother, there a sister, yonder four folk of her father's kraal. They came to a tall and handsome woman of middle age, and she shivered as she had done in the pool and said in an icy voice:

"The mother who bore me!"

A few more steps and in a patch of high grass that grew round an ant-heap, they found two Zulu soldiers,

each pierced through with a spear. Seated against the ant-heap also, as though he were but resting, was a light-coloured man, a dwarf in stature, spare of frame, and with sharp features. His dress, if he wore any, seemed to have been removed from him, for he was almost naked, and Rachel noticed that no wound could be seen on him.

"Behold my father!" said Noie in the same icy voice.

"But," whispered Rachel, "he only sleeps. No spear has touched him."

"Not so, he is dead, dead by the White Death after the fashion of his people."

Now Rachel wondered what this White Death might be, and of which people the man was one. That he was not a Zulu who had been stunted in his growth she could see for herself, nor had she ever met a native who at all resembled him. Still she could ask no questions at that time; the thing was too awful. Moreover Noie had knelt down before the body, and with her arms thrown around its neck, was whispering into its ear. For a full minute she whispered thus, then set her own ear to the cold stirless lips, and for another minute or more, seemed to listen intently, nodding her head from time to time. Never before had Rachel witnessed anything so uncanny, and oddly enough, the fact that this scene was enacted in the bright sunlight added to its terrors. She stood paralysed, forgetting the Zulus, forgetting everything except that to all appearance the living was holding converse with the dead.

At length Noie rose, and turning to her companion said:

"My Spirit has been good to me; I thank my Spirit, which brought me here before it was too late for us to talk together. Now I have the message."

"The message! Oh! what message?" gasped Rachel.

An inscrutable look gathered on the face of the beautiful native girl.

"It is to me alone," she answered, "but this I may say, much of it was of you, Inkosazana-y-Zoola."

"Who told you that was my native name?" asked Rachel, springing back.

"It was in the message, O thou before whom kings shall bow."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Rachel, "you have heard it from our people."

"So be it, Lady; I have heard it from your people whom I have never seen. Now let us go, your father is troubled for you."

Again Rachel looked at her sideways, and Noie went on:

"Lady, from henceforth I am your servant, am I not? and that service will not be light."

"She thinks I shall make her dig," thought Rachel to herself, as the girl continued in her low, soft voice:

"Now I ask you one thing—when I tell you my story, let it be for your breast alone. Say only that I am a common girl whom you saved from the soldier."

"Why not?" answered Rachel. "That is all I have to tell."

Then once more they went on, Rachel wondering if she dreamed, the girl Noie walking at her side, stern and cold-faced as a statue.

CHAPTER VI

THE CASTING OF THE LOTS

THEY reached the crest of the last rise, and there, facing them on the slope of the opposite wave of land, stood the waggon, surrounded by the thorn fence, within which the cattle and horses were still enclosed, doubtless for fear of the Zulus. Nothing could be more peaceful than the aspect of that camp. To look at it no one would have believed that within a few hundred yards a hideous massacre had just taken place. Presently, however, voices began to shout, and heads to bob up over the fence. Then it occurred to Rachel that they must think she was a prisoner in the charge of a Zulu, and she told Noie to lower the shield which she still held in front of her. The next instant some thorns were torn out, and her father, a gun in his hand, appeared striding towards them.

"Thank God that you are safe," he said as they met. "I have suffered great anxiety, although I hoped that the white man Israel—no, Ishmael—had rescued you. He came here to warn us," he added in explanation, "very early this morning, then galloped off to find you. Indeed his after-rider, whose horse he took, is still here. Where on earth have you been, Rachel, and—" suddenly becoming aware of Noie, who, arrayed only in a towel, a shield, and a stabbing spear, presented a curious if an impressive spectacle, "who is this young person?"

"She is a native girl I saved from the massacre,"

replied Rachel, answering the last question first. "It is a long story, but I shot the man who was going to kill her, and we hid in a pool. Are you all safe, and where is mother?"

"Shot the man! Shed human blood! Hid in a pool!" ejaculated Mr. Dove, overcome. "Really, Rachel, you are a most trying daughter. Why should you go out before daybreak and do such things?"

"I don't know, I am sure, father; predestination, I suppose—to save her life, you know."

Again he contemplated the beautiful Noie, then, murmuring something about a blanket, ran back to the camp. By this time Mrs. Dove had climbed out of the waggon and arrived with the Kaffirs.

"I knew you would be safe, Rachel," she said in her gentle voice, "because nothing can hurt you. Still you do upset your poor father dreadfully, and—what are you going to do with that naked young woman?"

"Give her something to eat, dear," answered Rachel. "Don't ask me any more questions now. We have been sitting up to our necks in water for hours, and are starved and frozen, to say nothing of worse things."

At this moment Mr. Dove arrived with a blanket, which he offered to Noie, who took it from him and threw it round her body. Then they went into the camp, where Rachel changed her damp clothes, whilst Noie sat by her in a corner of the tent. Presently, too, food was brought, and Rachel ate hungrily, forcing Noie to do the same. Then she went out, leaving the girl to rest in the tent, and with certain omissions, such as the conduct of Noie when she found her dead father, told all the story which, wild as were the times and strange as were the things that happened in them, they found wonderful enough.

When she had done Mr. Dove knelt down and offered up thanks for his daughter's preservation

through great danger, and with them prayers that she might be forgiven for having shot the Zulu, a deed that, except for the physical horror of it, did not weigh upon Rachel's mind.

"You know, father, you would have done the same yourself," she explained, "and so would mother there, if she could hold a gun, so what is the good of pretending that it is a sin? Also no one saw it except that white man and the crocodiles which buried the body, so the less we say about the matter the better it will be for all of us."

"I admit," answered Mr. Dove, "that the circumstances justified the deed, though I fear that the truth will out, since blood calls for blood. But what are we to do with the girl? They will come to seek her and kill us all."

"They will not seek, father, because they think that she is dead, and will never know otherwise unless that white man tells them, which he will scarcely do, as the Zulus would think that he shot the soldier, not I. She has been sent to us, and it is our duty to keep her."

"I suppose so," said her father doubtfully. "Poor thing! Truly she has cause for gratitude to Providence; all her relations killed by those bloodthirsty savages, and she saved!"

"If all of you were killed and I were saved, I do not know that I should feel particularly grateful," answered Rachel. "But it is no use arguing about such things, so let us be thankful that we are not killed too. Now I am tired out, and going to lie down, for of course we can't leave this place at present, unless we trek back to Durban."

Such was the finding of Noie.

When Rachel awoke from the sleep into which she had fallen, sunset was near at hand. She left the tent where Noie still lay slumbering or lost in stupor, to find that only her mother and Ishmael's after-rider

remained in the camp, her father having gone out with the Kaffirs, in order to bury as many of the dead as possible before night came, and with it the jackals and hyenas. Rachel made up the fire and set to work with her mother's help to cook their evening meal. Whilst they were thus engaged her quick ears caught the sound of horses' hoofs, and she looked up to perceive the white man, Ishmael, still leading the spare horse on which she had ridden that morning. He had halted on the crest of ground where she had first seen him upon the previous day, and was peering at the camp, with the object apparently of ascertaining whether its occupants were still alive.

"I will go and ask him in," said Rachel, who, for reasons of her own, wished to have a word or two with the man.

Presently she came up to him, and saw at once that he seemed to be very much ashamed of himself.

"Well," she said cheerfully, "you see here I am, safe enough, and I am glad that you are the same."

"You are a wonderful woman," he replied, letting his eyes sink before her clear gaze, "as wonderful as you are beautiful."

"No compliments, please," said Rachel, "they are out of place in this savage land."

"I beg your pardon, I could not help speaking the truth. Did they kill the girl and let you go?"

"No, I managed to hide up with her; she is here now."

"That is very dangerous, Miss Dove. I know all about it; it is she whom Dingaan was after. When he hears that you have sheltered her he will send and kill you all. Take my advice and turn her out at once. I say it is most dangerous."

"Perhaps," answered Rachel calmly, "but all the same I shall do nothing of the sort unless she wishes to go, nor do I think that my father will either. Now please listen a minute. If this story comes to the

ears of the Zulus—and I do not see why it should, as the crocodiles have eaten that soldier—who will they think shot him, I or the white man who was with me? Do you understand?"

"I understand and shall hold my tongue, for your sake."

"No, for your own. Well, by way of making the bargain fair, for my part I shall say as little as possible of how we separated this morning. Not that I blame you for riding off and leaving an obstinate young woman whom you did not know to take her chance. Still, other people might think differently."

"Yes," he answered, "they might, and I admit that I am ashamed of myself. But you don't know the Zulus as I do, and I thought that they would be all on us in a moment; also I was mad with you and lost my nerve. Really I am very sorry."

"Please don't apologise. It was quite natural, and what is more, all for the best. If we had gone on we should have ridden right into them, and perhaps never ridden out again. Now here comes my father; we have agreed that you will not say too much about this girl, have we not?"

He nodded and advanced with her, leading the horses, for he had dismounted, to meet Mr. Dove at the opening in the fence.

"Good-evening," said the clergyman, who seemed depressed after his sad task, as he motioned to one of the Kaffirs to put down his mattock and take the horses. "I don't quite know what happened this morning, but I have to thank you for trying to save my daughter from those cruel men. I have been burying their victims in a little cleft that we found, or rather some of them. The vultures you know——" and he paused.

"I didn't save her, sir," answered the stranger humbly. "It seemed hopeless, as she would not leave the Kaffir girl."

Mr. Dove looked at him searchingly, and there was a suspicion of contempt in his voice as he replied:

"You would not have had her abandon the poor thing, would you? For the rest, God saved them both, so it does not much matter exactly how, as everything has turned out for the best. Won't you come in and have some supper, Mr.—Ishmael—I am afraid I do not know the rest of your name."

"There is no more to know, Mr. Dove," he replied doggedly, then added: "Look here, sir, as I daresay you have found out, this is a rough country, and people come to it, some of them, whose luck has been rough elsewhere. Now, perhaps I am as well born as you are, and perhaps *my* luck was rough in other lands, so that I chose to come and live in a place where there are no laws or civilisation. Perhaps, too, I took the name of another man who was driven into the wilderness—you will remember all about him—also that it does not seem to have been his fault. Any way, if we should be thrown up together I'll ask you to take me as I am, that is, a hunter and a trader 'in the Zulu,' and not to bother about what I have been. Whatever I was christened, my name is Ishmael now, or among the Kaffirs Ibubesi, and if you want another, let us call it Smith."

"Quite so, Mr. Ishmael. It is no affair of mine," replied Mr. Dove with a smile, for he had met people of this sort before in Africa.

But within himself already he determined that this white and perchance fallen wanderer was one whom, perhaps, it would be his duty to lead back into the paths of Christian propriety and peace.

These matters settled, they went into the little camp, and a sentry having been set, for now the night was falling fast, Ishmael was introduced to Mrs. Dove, who looked him up and down and said little, after which they began their supper. When their simple

meal was finished, Ishmael lit his pipe and sat himself upon the disselboom of the waggon, looking extremely handsome and picturesque in the flare of the firelight which fell upon his dark face, long black hair and curious garments; for although he had replaced his lion-skin by an old coat, his zebra-hide trousers and waistcoat made of an otter's pelt still remained. Contemplating him, Rachel felt sure that whatever his present and past might be, he had spoken the truth when he hinted that he was well-born. Indeed, this might be gathered from his voice and method of expressing himself when he grew more at ease, although it was true that sometimes he substituted a Zulu for an English word, and employed its idioms in his sentences, doubtless because for years he had been accustomed to speak and even to think in that language.

Now he was explaining to Mr. Dove the political and social position among that people, whose cruel laws and customs led to constant flights on the part of tribes or families, who knew that they were doomed, and their consequent massacre if caught, as had happened that day. Of course, the clergyman, who had lived for some years at Durban, knew that this was true, although never having actually witnessed one of these dreadful events till now, he did not realise all their horror.

"I fear that my task will be even harder than I thought," he said with a sigh.

"What task?" asked Ishmael.

"That of converting the Zulus. I am trekking to the king's kraal now, and propose to settle there."

Ishmael knocked out his pipe and filled it again before he answered. Apparently he could find no words in which to express his thoughts, but when at length these came they were vigorous enough.

"Why not trek to hell and settle *there* at once?" he asked, "I beg pardon, I meant heaven, for you and your likes. Man," he went on excitedly, "have

you any heart? Do you care about your wife and daughter?"

"I have always imagined that I did, Mr. Ishmael," replied the missionary in a cold voice.

"Then do you wish to see their throats cut before your eyes, or," and he looked at Rachel, "worse?"

"How can you ask such questions?" said Mr. Dove, indignantly. "Of course I know that there are risks among all wild peoples, but I trust to Providence to protect us."

Mr. Ishmael puffed at his pipe and swore to himself in Zulu.

"Yes," he said, when he had recovered a little, "so I suppose did Seyapi and his people, but you have been burying them this afternoon—haven't you?—all except the girl, Noie, whom you have sheltered, for which deed Dingaan will bury you all if you go into Zululand, or rather throw you to the vultures. Don't think that your being an *umfundusi*, I mean a teacher, will save you. The Almighty Himself can't save you there. You will be dead and forgotten in a month. What's more, you will have to drive your own waggon in, for your Kaffirs won't, they know better. A Bible won't turn the blade of an assegai."

"Please, Mr. Ishmael, please do not speak so—so irreligiously," said Mr. Dove in an irritated but nervous voice. "You do not seem to understand that I have a mission to perform, and if that should involve martyrdom——"

"Oh! bother martyrdom, which is what you are after, no doubt, 'casting down your golden crown upon a crystal sea,' and the rest of it—I remember the stuff. The question is, do you wish to murder your wife and daughter, for that's the plain English of it?"

"Of course not. How can you suggest such a thing?"

"Then you had better not cross the Tugela. Go back to Durban, or stop where you are at least, for,

unless he finds out anything, Dingaan is not likely to interfere with a white man on this side of the river."

"That would involve abandoning my most cherished ambition, and impulses that—but I will not speak to you of things which perhaps you might not understand."

"I daresay I shouldn't, but I do understand what it feels like to have your neck twisted out of joint. Look here, sir, if you want to go to Zululand, you should go alone; it is no place for white ladies."

"That is for them to judge, sir," answered Mr. Dove. "I believe that their faith will be equal to this trial," and he looked at his wife almost imploringly.

For once, however, she failed him.

"My dear John," she said, "if you want my opinion, I think that this gentleman is quite right. For myself I don't care much, but it can never have been intended that we should absolutely throw away our lives. I have always given way to you, and followed you to many strange places without grumbling, although, as you know, we might be quite comfortable at home, or at any rate in some civilised town. Now I say that I think you ought not to go to Zululand, especially as there is Rachel to think of."

"Oh! don't trouble about me," interrupted that young lady, with a shrug of her shoulders. "I can take my chance as I have often done before—to-day, for instance."

"But I do trouble about you, my dear, although it is true I don't believe that you will be killed; you know I have always said so. Still I do trouble, and John—John," she added in a kind of pitiful cry, "can't you see that you have worn me out? Can't you understand that I am getting old and weak? Is there nobody to whom you have a duty as well as to the heathen? Are there not enough heathen here?" she went on with gathering passion. "If you must mix with them, do what this gentleman says, and stop

here, that is, if you won't go back. Build a house and let us have a little peace before we die, for death will come soon enough, and terribly enough, I am sure," and she burst into a fit of weeping.

"My dear," said Mr. Dove, "you are upset; the unhappy occurrences of to-day, which—did we but know it—are doubtless all for the best, and your anxiety for Rachel have been too much for you. I think that you had better go to bed, and you too, Rachel. I will talk the matter over further with Mr. Ishmael, who, perhaps, has been sent to guide me. I am not unreasonable, as you think, and if he can convince me that there is any risk to your lives—for my own I care nothing—I will consider the suggestion of building a mission-station outside Zululand, at any rate for a few years. It may be that it is not intended that we should enter that country at present."

So Mrs. Dove and her daughter went, but for two hours or more Rachel heard her father and the hunter talking earnestly, and wondered in a sleepy fashion to what conclusion he had come. Personally she did not mind much on which side of the Tugela they were to live, if they must bide at all in the region of that river. Still, for her mother's sake she determined that if she could bring it about, they should stay where they were. Indeed there was no choice between this and returning to England, as her father had quarrelled too bitterly with the white men at Durban to allow of his taking up his residence among them again.

When Rachel woke on the following morning the first thing she saw in the growing light was the orphaned native Noie, seated on the further side of the little tent, her head resting upon her hand, and gazing at her vacantly. Rachel watched her a while, pretending to be still asleep, and for the first time understood how beautiful this girl was in her own fashion. Although small, that is in comparison with most Kaffir women,

she was perfectly shaped and developed. Her soft skin in that light looked almost white, although it had about it nothing of the muddy colour of the half-breed; her hair was long, black and curly, and worn naturally, not forced into artificial shapes as is common among the Kaffirs. Her features were finely cut and intellectual, and her eyes, shaded by long lashes, somewhat oblong in shape, of a brown colour, and soft as those of a buck. Certainly for a native she was lovely, and what is more, quite unlike any Bantu that Rachel had ever seen, except indeed that dead man whom she said was her father, and who, although he was so small, had managed to kill two great Zulu warriors before, mysteriously enough, he died himself.

"Noie," said Rachel, when she had completed her observations, whereon with a quick and agile movement the girl rose, sank again on her knees beside her, took the hand that hung from the bed between her own, and pressed it to her lips, saying in the soft Zulu tongue,

"Inkosazana, I am here."

"Is that white man still asleep, Noie?"

"Nay, he has gone. He and his servant rode away before the light, fearing lest there might still be Zulus between him and his kraal."

"Do you know anything about him, Noie?"

"Yes, Lady, I have seen him in Zululand. He is a bad man. They call him there 'Lion,' not because he is brave, but because he hunts and springs by night."

"Just what I should have thought of him," answered Rachel, "and we know that he is not brave," she added with a smile. "But never mind this jackal in a lion's hide; tell me your story, Noie, if you will, only speak low, for this tent is thin."

"Lady," said the girl, "you who were born white in body and in spirit, hear me. I am but half a Zulu.

My father who died yesterday in the flesh, departing back to the world of ghosts, was of another people who live far to the north, a small people but a strong. They live among the trees, they worship trees; they die when their tree dies; they are dealers in dreams; they are the companions of ghosts, little men before whom the tribes tremble; who hate the sun, and dwell in the deep of the forest. Myself I do not know them; I have never seen them, but my father told me these things, and others that I may not repeat. When he was a young man my father fled from his people."

"Why?" asked Rachel, for the girl paused.

"Lady, I do not know; I think it was because he would have been their priest, or one of their priests, and he feared. I think that he had seen a woman, a slave to them, whom therefore he might not marry. I think that woman was my mother. So he fled from them—with her, and came to live among the Zulus. He was a great doctor there in Chaka's time, not one of the *Abangomas,* not one of the 'Smellers-out-of-witches,' not a 'Bringer-down-to-death,' for like all his race he hated bloodshed. No, none of these things, but a doctor of medicines, a master of magic, an interpreter of dreams, a lord of wisdom; yes, it was his wisdom that made Chaka great, and when he withdrew it from him because of his cruelties, then Chaka died.

"Lady, Dingaan rules in Chaka's place, Dingaan who slew him, but although he had been Chaka's doctor, my father was spared because they feared him. I was the only child of my mother, but he took other wives after the Zulu fashion, not because he loved them, I think, but that he might not seem different to other men. So he grew great and rich, and lived in peace because they feared him. Lady, my father loved me, and to me alone he taught his language and his wisdom. I helped him with his medicines; I interpreted the

dreams which he could not interpret, his blanket fell upon me. Often I was sought in marriage, but I did not wish to marry, Wisdom is my husband.

"There came an evil day; we knew that it must come, my father and I, and I wished to fly the land, but he could not do so because of his other wives and children. The maidens of my district were marshalled for the king to see. His eye fell upon me, and he thought me fair because I am different from Zulu women, and —you can guess. Yet I was saved, for the other doctors and the head wives of the king said that it was not wise that I should be taken into his house, I who knew too many secrets and could bewitch him if I willed, or poison him with drugs that leave no trace. So I escaped a while and was thankful. Now it came about that because he might not take me Dingaan began to think much of me, and to dream of me at nights. At last he asked me of my father, as a gift, not as a right, for so he thought that no ill will would come with me. But I prayed my father to keep me from Dingaan, for I hated Dingaan, and told him that if I were sent to the king, I would poison him. My father listened to me because he loved me and could not bear to part with me, and said Dingaan nay. Now Dingaan grew very angry and asked counsel of his other doctors, but they would give him none because they feared my father. Then he asked counsel of that white man, Hishmel, who is called the Lion, and who is much at the kraal of Umgungundhlovu."

"Ah!" said Rachel, "now I understand why he wished you to be killed."

"The white man, Hishmel, the jackal in a lion's skin, as you named him, laughed at Dingaan's fears. He said to him, 'It is of the father, Seyapi, you should be afraid. He has the magic, not the girl. Kill the father, and his house, and take the daughter whom your heart desires, and be happy.'

"So spoke Hishmel, and Dingaan thought his

counsel good, and paid him for it with the teeth of elephants, and certain women for whom he asked. Now my father foreboded ill, and I also, for both of us had dreamed a dream. Still we did not fly until the slayers were almost at the gates, because of his other wives and his children. Nor, save for them would he have fled then, or I either, but would have died after the fashion of his people, as he did at last."

"The White Death?" queried Rachel.

"Yes, Lady, the White Death. Still in the end we fled, thinking to gain the protection of the white men down yonder. I went first to escape the king's men who had orders to take me alive and bring me to him, that is why we were not together at the end. Lady, you know the rest. Hishmel doubtless had seen you, and thinking that the Impi would kill you, came to warn you. Then we met just as I was about to die, though perhaps not by that soldier's spear, as you thought. I have spoken."

"What message came to you when you knelt down before your dead father?" asked Rachel for the second time, since on this point she was intensely curious.

Again that inscrutable look gathered on the girl's face, and she answered.

"Did I not tell you it was for my ear alone, O Inkosazana-y-Zoola? I dare not say it, be satisfied. But this I may say. Your fate and mine are intertwined; yours and mine and another's, for our spirits are sisters which have dwelt together in past days."

"Indeed," said Rachel smiling, for she who had mixed with them from her childhood knew something of the mysticism of the natives, also that it was often nonsense. "Well, Noie, I love you, I know not why. Perhaps, for all you have suffered. Yet I say to you that if you wish to remain my sister in the spirit, you had better separate from me in the flesh. That jackal

man knows your secret, girl, and soon or late will loose the assegai on you."

"Doubtless," she answered, "doubtless many things will come about. But they are doomed to come about. Whether I go or whether I stay they will happen. Say you therefore, Lady, and I will obey. Shall I go or shall I stay, or shall I die before your eyes?"

"It is on your own head," answered Rachel shrugging her shoulders.

"Nay, nay, Lady, you forget, it is on yours also, seeing that if I stay I may bring peril on you and your house. Have you then no order for me?"

"Noie, I have answered—none. Judge you."

"I will not judge. Let Heaven-above judge. Lady, give me a hair from your head."

Rachel plucked out the hair and handed it, a shining thread of gold, to Noie, who drew one from her own dark tresses, and laid them side by side.

"See," she said, "they are of the same length. Now, without the wind blows gently; come then to the door of the tent, and I will throw these two hairs into the wind. If that which is black floats first to the ground, then I stay, if that which is golden, then I go to seek my hair. Is it agreed?"

"It is agreed."

So the two girls went to the entrance of the tent, and Noie with a swift motion tossed up the hairs. As it happened one of those little eddies of wind which are common in South Africa, caught them, causing them to rise almost perpendicularly into the air. At a certain height, about forty feet, the supporting wind seemed to fail, that is so far as the hair from Noie's head was concerned, for there it floated high above them like a black thread in the sunlight, and gently by slow degrees came to the earth just at their feet. But the hair from Rachel's head, being caught by the fringe of the whirlwind, was borne upwards

and onwards very swiftly, until at length it vanished from their sight.

"It seems that I stay," said Noie.

"Yes," answered Rachel. "I am very glad; also if any evil comes of it we are not to blame, the wind is to blame."

"Yes, Lady, but what makes the wind to blow?"

Again Rachel shrugged her shoulders, and asked a question in her turn.

"Whither has that hair of mine been borne, Noie?"

"I do not know, Lady. Perhaps my father's spirit took it for his own ends. I think so. I think it went northwards. At any rate when mine fell, it was snatched away, was it not? And yet they both floated up together. I think that one day you will follow that hair of yours, Lady, follow it to the land where great trees whisper secrets to the night."

CHAPTER VII

THE MESSAGE OF THE KING

So it chanced that Noie became a member of the Dove household. For obvious reasons she changed her name, and thenceforward was called Nonha. Also it happened that Mr. Dove abandoned his idea of settling as a missionary in Zululand, and instead, took up his residence at this beautiful spot. He called it Ramah because it was a place of weeping, for here all the family and dependents of Seyapi had been destroyed by the spear. Mrs. Dove thought it an ill-omened name enough, but after her manner gave way to her husband in the matter.

"I think there will be more weeping here before everything is done," she said.

Rachel answered, however, that it was as good as any other, since names could alter nothing. Here, then, at Ramah, Mr. Dove built him a house on that knoll where first he had pitched his camp. It was a very good house after its fashion, for, as has been said, he did not lack for means, and was, moreover, clever in such matters. He hired a mason who had drifted to Natal, to cut stone of which a plenty lay at hand, and two half-breed carpenters to execute the woodwork, whilst the Kaffirs thatched the whole as only they can do. Then he set to work upon a church which was placed on the crest of the opposite knoll where the white man, Ishmael, had appeared on the evening of their arrival. Like the house, it was excellent of its sort, and when at length it was finished

after more than a year of labour, Mr. Dove felt a proud man.

Indeed at Ramah he was happier than he had ever been since he landed upon the shores of Africa, for now at length his dream seemed to be in the way of realisation. Very soon a considerable native village sprang up around him, peopled almost entirely by remnants of the Natal tribes whom Chaka had destroyed and who were but too glad to settle under the ægis of the white man, especially when they discovered how good he was. Of the doctrines which he preached to them day and night, most of them, it is true, did not understand much. Still they accepted them as the price of being allowed "to live in his shadow," but in the vast majority of cases they sturdily refused to put away all wives but one, as he earnestly exhorted them to do.

At first he wished to eject them from the settlement in punishment of this sin, but when it came to the point they absolutely refused to go, demonstrating to him that they had as much right to live there as he had, an argument that he was unable to controvert. So he was obliged to submit to the presence of this abomination, which he did in the hope that in time their hard hearts would be softened.

"Continue to preach to us, O Shouter," they said, "and we will listen. Mayhap in years to come we shall learn to think as you do. Meanwhile give us space to consider the point."

So he continued to preach, and contented himself with baptising the children and very old people who took no more wives. Except on this one point, however, they got on excellently together. Indeed, never since Chaka broke upon them like a destroying demon had these poor folk been so happy. The missionary imported ploughs and taught them to improve their agriculture, so that ere long this rich, virgin soil brought forth abundantly. Their few cattle multiplied also in an

amazing fashion, as did their families, and soon they were as prosperous as they had been in the good old days before they knew the Zulu assegai, especially as, to their amazement, the Shouter never took from them even a calf or a bundle of corn by way of tax. Only the shadow of that Zulu assegai still lay upon them, for if Chaka was dead Dingaan ruled a few miles away across the Tugela. Moreover, hearing of the rise of this new town, and of certain strange matters connected with it, he sent spies to inspect and enquire. The spies returned and reported that there dwelt in it only a white medicine-man with his wife, and a number of Natal Kaffirs. Also they reported in great detail many wonderful stories concerning the beautiful maiden with a high name who passed as the white teacher's daughter, and who had already become the subject of so much native talk and rumour. On learning all these things Dingaan despatched an embassy who delivered this message:

"I, Dingaan, king of the Zulus, have heard that you, O White Shouter, have built a town upon my borders, and peopled it with the puppies of the jackals whom Chaka hunted. I send to you now to say that you and your jackals shall have peace from me so long as you harbour none of my runaways, but if I find but one of them there, then an Impi shall wipe you out. I hear also that there dwells with you a beautiful white maiden said to be your daughter, who is known throughout the land as Inkosazana-y-Zoola. Now that is the name of our Spirit who, the doctors say, is also white, and it is strange to us that this maiden should bear that great name. Some of the *Isanusis*, the prophetesses, declare that she is our Spirit in the flesh, but that meat sticks in my throat, I cannot swallow it. Still, I invite this maiden to visit me that I may see her and judge of her, and I swear to you, and to her, by the ghosts of my ancestors, that no harm shall come to her then

or at any time. He who so much as lays a finger upon her shall die, he and all his house. Because of her name, which I am told she has borne from a child, all the territories of the Zulus are her kraal and all the thousands of the Zulus are her servants. Yea, because of her high name I give to her the power of life and death wherever men obey my word, and for an offering I send to her twelve of my royal white cattle and a bull, also an ox trained to riding. When she visits me let her ride upon this white ox that she may be known, but let no man come with her, for among the people of the Zulus she must be attended by Zulus only. I have spoken. I pray that she who is named Princess of the Zulus will appear before my messengers and acknowledge the gift of the King of the Zulus, that they may see her in the flesh and make report of her to me."

Now when Mr. Dove had received this message, one evening at sundown, he went into the house and repeated it to Rachel, for it puzzled him much, and he knew not what to answer.

Rachel in her turn took counsel with Noie who was hidden away lest some of the embassy should see and recognise her.

"Speak with the messengers," said Noie, "it is well to have power among the Zulus. I, who have some knowledge of this business, say, speak with them alone, and speak softly, saying that one day you will come."

So having explained the matter to her father, and obtained his consent, Rachel, who desired to impress these savages, threw a white shawl about her, as Noie instructed her to do. Then, letting her long, golden hair hang down, she went out alone carrying a light assegai in her hand, to the place where the messengers, six of them, and those who had driven the cattle from Zululand, were encamped in the guest kraal, at the gate of which, as it chanced, lay a great boulder of rock. On this boulder she took her stand, unobserved, waiting

there till the full moon shone out from behind a dark cloud, turning her white robe to silver. Now of a sudden the messengers who were seated together, talking and taking snuff, looked up and saw her.

"*Inkosazana-y-Zoola!*" exclaimed one of them, rising, whereon they all sprang to their feet and perceiving this beautiful and mysterious figure, by a common impulse lifted their right arms and gave to her what no woman had ever received before—the royal salute.

"Bayète!" they cried, "Bayète!" then stood silent.

"I hear you," said Rachel, who spoke their tongue as well as she did her own. "It has been reported to me that you wished to see me, O Mouths of the King. Behold I am pleased to appear before you. What would you of Inkosazana-y-Zoola, O Mouths of the King?"

Then their spokesman, an old man of high rank, with a withered hand, stepped forward from the line of his companions, stared at her for a while, and saluted again.

"Lady," he said humbly, "Lady or Spirit, we would know how thou camest by that great name of thine."

"It was given me as a child far away from here," she answered, "because in a mighty tempest the lightnings turned aside and smote me not; because the waters raged yet drowned me not; because the lions slept with me yet harmed me not. It came to me from the high Heaven that was my friend. I do not know how it came."

"We have heard the story," answered the old man (which indeed they had with many additions), "and we believe. We believe that the Heavens above gave thee their own name which is the name of the Spirit of our people. That Spirit I have seen in a dream, and she was like to thee, O Inkosazana-y-Zoola."

"It may be so, Mouth of the King, still I am woman, not spirit."

"Yet in every woman there dwells a spirit, or so we believe, and in thee a great one, or so we have heard and believe, O Lady of the Heavens. To thee, then, again we repeat the words of Dingaan and of his council which to-day we have said in the ears of him who thinks himself thy father. To thee the roads are open; thine are the cattle in the kraals; here is an earnest of them. Thine are the lives of men. Command now, if thou wilt, that one of us be slain before thee, and whilst thou watchest, he shall look his last upon the moon."

"I hear you," said Rachel, quietly, "but I seek the life of none who are good. I thank the King for his gift; I wish the King well. I remember that life and death lie in my hands. Say these words to the King."

"We will say them, but wilt thou not come, O Lady, as the King desires? A regiment shall meet thee on the river bank and lead thee to his house. Unharmed shalt thou come, unharmed shalt thou return, and what thou askest that shall be given thee."

"One day, perchance, I will come, but not now. Go in peace, O Mouths of the King."

As she spoke another dark cloud floated across the moon, and when it had passed away she stood no more upon the rock. Then, seeing that she was gone, those messengers gathered up their spears and mats, and returned swiftly to Zululand.

When she reached the house again Rachel told her father and mother all that had passed, laughing as she spoke.

"It seems scarcely right, my dear," said Mr. Dove, when she had done. "Those benighted heathens will really believe that you are something unearthly."

"Then let them," she answered. "It can do no one any harm, and the power of life and death with

the rest of it, unless it was all talk as I suspect, might be very useful one day. Who knows? And now the Princess of the Heavens will go and set the supper, as Noie—I beg pardon, Nonha—is off duty for the present."

Afterwards she asked Noie who was the old man with a withered hand who had spoken as the "King's Mouth."

"Mopo is his name, Mopo or Umbopo, none other, O Zoola," she answered. "It was he who stabbed T'Chaka, the Black One. It is said also that alone among men living, he has seen the White Spirit: the Inkosazana. Thrice has he seen her, or so goes the tale that my father, who knew everything, told to me. That is why Dingaan sent him here to make report of you." And she told her all the wonderful story of Mopo and of the death of T'Chaka, which Rachel treasured in her mind.*

Such was Rachel's first introduction to the Zulus, an occasion on which her undoubted histrionic abilities stood her in good stead.

This matter of the embassy happened and in due course was almost forgotten, that is until a certain event occurred which brought it into mind. For some time, however, Rachel thought of it a good deal, wondering how it came about that her native name and the strange significance which they appeared to give to it had taken such a hold of the imagination of the Zulus. Ultimately she discovered that the white man, Ishmael, was the chief cause of these things. He had lived so long among savages that he had caught something of their mind and dark superstitions. To him, as to them, it seemed a marvellous thing that she should have acquired the title of the legendary Spirit of the Zulu people. The calm courage, too, so unusual in a woman, which she showed when she shot the warrior, and at the risk of her own life saved

* For the history of Mopo see "Nada the Lily."—AUTHOR.

that of the girl, Noie, impressed him as something almost ultra-human, especially when he remembered his own conduct on that occasion. All of this story, of course, he did not tell to the Zulus for he feared lest they should take vengeance for his share in it. But of Rachel he discoursed to the King and his *indunas*, or great men, as a white witch-doctoress of supernatural power, whose name showed that she was mixed up with the fortunes of the race. Therefore, in the end, Dingaan sent Mopo, "he who knew the Spirit," to make report of her.

When he was not absent upon his hunting or trading expeditions, Ishmael visited Ramah a great deal and, as Rachel soon discovered, not without an object. Indeed, almost from the first, her feminine instincts led her to suspect that this man who, notwithstanding his good looks, repelled her so intensely, was falling in love with her, which in truth he had done once and for all at their first meeting. In the beginning he did not, it is true, say much that could be so interpreted, but his whole attitude towards her suggested it, as did other things. For instance, when he came to visit the Doves, he discarded his garments of hide, including the picturesque zebra-skin trousers, and appeared dressed in smart European clothes which he had contrived to obtain from Durban, and a large hat with a white ostrich feather, that struck Rachel as even more ludicrous than the famous trousers. Also he was continuously sending presents of game and of skins, or of rare karosses, that is, fur rugs, which he ordered to be delivered to her personally —tokens, all of them, that she could not misunderstand. Her father, however, misunderstood them persistently, although her mother saw something of the truth, and did her best to shield her from attentions which she knew to be unwelcome. Mr. Dove believed that it was his company which Ishmael sought. Indeed in this matter the man was very clever, contriving to

give the clergyman the impression that he required spiritual instruction and comfort, which, of course, he found forthcoming in an abundant supply. When Mrs. Dove remonstrated, saying that she misdoubted her of him and his character, her husband answered obstinately, that it was his duty to turn a sinner from his way, and declined to pursue the conversation. So Ishmael continued to come.

For her part Rachel did her best to avoid him, instructing Noie to keep a constant look-out both with her eyes and through the Kaffirs, and to warn her of his advent. Then she would slip away into the bush or down to the seashore, and remain there till he was gone, or if he came when she could not do so, in the evening for instance, would keep Noie at her side, and on the first opportunity retire to her own room.

Now the result of this method of self-protection was to cause Ishmael to hate Noie as bitterly as she hated him. He guessed that the girl knew the dreadful truth about him; that it was he, and no other, who had counselled Dingaan to kill her father and all his family, and take her by force into his house, and although she said nothing of it, he suspected that she had told everything to Rachel. Moreover, it was she who always thwarted him, who prevented him time upon time from having a single word alone with her mistress. Therefore he determined to be revenged upon Noie whenever an opportunity occurred. But as yet he could find none, since if he were to tell the Zulus that she still lived, and cause her to be killed or taken away, he was sure that it would mean a final breach with the Dove family, all of whom had learned to love this beautiful orphan maid. So he nursed his rage in secret.

Meanwhile his passion increased daily, burning ever more fiercely for its continued repression, until at length the chance for which he had waited so long came to him.

Having become aware of Rachel's habit of slipping away whenever he appeared, he showed himself on horseback at a little distance, then waited a while and, instead of going up to the mission station, rode round it, and hid in some bush whence he could command a view of the surrounding country. Presently he saw Rachel, who was alone, for she had not waited to call Noie, hurrying towards the seashore, along the edge of that kloof down which ran the stream where the crocodiles lived. Presently, when she had gone too far to return to the house if she caught sight of him, he followed after her, and, leaving his horse, at last came up with her seated on a rock by the pool in which she had bathed on the morning of the massacre.

Walking softly in his veld-schoens, or shoes made of raw hide, on the sand, Rachel knew nothing of his coming until his shadow fell upon her. Then she sprang up and saw him, smiling and bowing, the ostrich-plume hat in his hand. Her first impulse was to run away, but recovering herself, she nodded in a friendly fashion, and bade him "Good day," adding:

"What are you doing here, Mr. Ishmael, hunting?"

"Yes," he answered, "that's it. Hunting you. It has been a long chase, but I have caught you at last."

"Really, I am not a wild creature, Mr. Ishmael," she said indignantly.

"No," he answered, "you are more beautiful and more dangerous than any wild creature."

Rachel looked at him. Then she made as though she would pass him, saying that she was going home. Now Ishmael stood between two rocks filling the only egress from this place.

He stretched out his arms so that his fingers touched the rocks on either side, and said:

"You can't. You must listen to me first. I came here to say what I have wanted to tell you for

a long time. I love you, and I ask you to marry me."

"Indeed," she replied, setting her face. "How can that be? I understood that you were already married—several times over."

"Who told you that?" he asked, angrily. "I know—that accursed little witch, Noie."

"Don't speak any ill of Noie, please; she is my friend."

"Then you have a liar for your friend. Those women are only my servants."

"It doesn't matter to me what they are, Mr. Ishmael. I have no wish to know your private affairs. Shall we stop this talk which is not pleasant?"

"No," he answered. "I tell you that I love you and I mean to marry you, with your will or without it. Let it be with your will, Rachel," he added, pleadingly, "for I will make you a good husband. Also I am well-born, much better than you think, and I am rich, rich enough to take you out of this country, if you like. I have thousands of cattle, and a great deal of money put by, good English gold that I have got from the sale of ivory. You shall come with me from among all these savage people back to England, and live as you like."

"Thank you, but I prefer the savages, as you seem to have done until now. No, do not try to touch me; you know that I can defend myself if I choose," and she glanced at the pistol which she always carried in that wild land, "I am not afraid of you, Mr. Ishmael; it is you who are afraid of me."

"Perhaps I am," he exclaimed, "because those Zulus are right, you are *tagati*, an enchantress, not like other women, white or black. If it were not so, would you have driven me mad as you have done? I tell you I can't sleep for thinking of you. Oh! Rachel, Rachel, don't be angry with me. Have pity on me. Give me some hope. I know that my life has been

rough in the past, but I will become good again for your sake and live like a Christian. But if you refuse me, if you send me back to hell—then you shall learn what I can be."

"I know what you are, Mr. Ishmael, and that is quite enough. I do not wish to be unkind, or to say anything that will pain you, but please go away, and never try to speak to me again like this, as it is quite useless. You must understand that I will never marry you, never."

"Are you in love with somebody else?" he asked hoarsely, and at the question, do what she would to prevent it, Rachel coloured a little.

"How can I be in love here, unless it were with a dream?"

"A dream, a dream of a man you mean. Well, don't let him cross my path, or it will soon be the dream of a ghost. I tell you I'd kill him. If I can't have you, no one else shall. Do you understand?"

"I understand that I am tired of this. Let me go home, please."

"Home! Soon you will have no home to go to except mine—that is, if you don't change your mind about me. I have power here—don't you understand? I have power."

As he spoke these words the man looked so evil that Rachel shivered a little. But she answered boldly enough:

"I understand that you have no power at all against me; no one has. It is I who have the power."

"Yes, because as I said, you are *tagati*, but there are others——"

As these words passed his lips someone slipped by him. Starting back, he saw that it was Noie, draped in her usual white robe, for nothing would induce her to wear European clothes. Passing him as though she saw him not, she went to Rachel and said,

"Inkosazana, I was at my work in the house yonder

and I thought that I heard you calling me down here by the seashore, so I came. Is it your pleasure that I should accompany you home ? "

" For instance," he went on furiously, " there is that black slut whom you are fond of. Well, if I can't hurt you, I can hurt her. Daughter of Seyapi, you know how runaways die in Zululand, or if you don't you shall soon learn. I will pay you back for all your tricks," and he stopped, choking with rage.

Noie looked him up and down with her soft, dreamy brown eyes.

" Do you think so, Night-prowler ? " she asked. " Do you think that what you did to the father and his house, you will do to the daughter also ? Well, it is strange, but last night, just before the cock crew, I sat by Seyapi's grave, and he spoke to me of you, White Man. Listen, now, and I will tell you what he said," and stepping forward she whispered in his ear.

Rachel, watching, saw the man's swarthy face turn pale as he hearkened, then he lifted his hand as though to strike her, let it fall again, and muttering curses in English and in Zulu, turned and walked, or rather staggered away.

" What did you tell him, Noie ? " asked Rachel.

" Never mind, Zoola," she answered. " Perhaps the truth ; perhaps what came into my mind. At any rate I frightened him away. He was making love to you, was he not, the low *silwana* (wild beast) ? Ah ! I thought so, for that he has wished to do for long. And he threatened, did he not ? Well, you are right ; he cannot hurt you at all, and me only a little, I think. But he is very dangerous and very strong, and can hurt others. If your father is wise he will leave this place, Zoola."

" I think so too," answered Rachel. " Let us go home and tell him so."

CHAPTER VIII

MR. DOVE VISITS ISHMAEL

When Rachel and Noie reached the house, which they did not do for some time, as they waited to make sure that Ishmael had really gone, it was to see the man himself riding away from its gate.

"Be prepared," said Noie; "I think that he has been here before us to pour poison into your father's ears."

So it proved to be, indeed, for on the stoep or verandah they found Mr. Dove walking up and down evidently much disturbed in mind.

"What is all this trouble, Rachel?" he asked. "What have you done to Mr. Smith"—for Mr. Dove in pursuance of the suggestion made by the man, had adopted that name for him which he considered less peculiar than Ishmael. "He has been here much upset, declaring that you have used him cruelly, and that Nonha threatened him with terrible things in the future, of which, of course, she can know nothing."

"Well, father, if you wish to hear," answered Rachel, "Mr. Ishmael, or Mr. Smith as you call him, has been asking me to marry him, and when I refused, as of course I did, behaved very unpleasantly."

"Indeed, Rachel. I gathered from him that something of the sort had happened, only his story is that it was you who behaved unpleasantly, speaking to him as though he were dirt. Now, Rachel, of course I do not want you to marry this person, in fact, I should dislike it, although I have seen a great change

for the better in him lately—I mean spiritually of course—and an earnest repentance for the errors of his past life. All I mean is that the proffered affection of an honest man should not be met with scorn and sharp words."

Up to this point Rachel endured the lecture in silence, but now she could bear no more.

"Honest man!" she exclaimed. "Father, are you deaf and blind, or only so good yourself that you cannot see evil in others? Do you know that it was this 'honest man' who brought about the murder of all Noie's people in order that he might curry favour with the Zulus?"

Mr. Dove started, and turning, asked,

"Is that so, Nonha?"

"It is so, Teacher," answered Noie, "although I have never spoken of it to you. Afterwards I will tell you the story, if you wish."

"And do you know," went on Rachel, "why he will never let you visit his kraal among the hills yonder? Well, I will tell you. It is because this 'honest man,' who wishes me to marry him, keeps his Kaffir wives and children there?"

"Rachel!" replied her father, in much distress, "I will never believe it; you are only repeating native scandal. Why, he has often spoken to me with horror of such things."

"I daresay he has, father. Well, now, I ask you to judge for yourself. Take a guide and start two hours before daybreak to-morrow morning to visit that kraal, and see if what I say is not true."

"I will, indeed," exclaimed Mr. Dove, who was now thoroughly aroused, for it was conduct of this sort that had caused his bitter quarrel with the first settlers in Natal. "I cannot believe the story, Rachel, I really cannot; but I promise you that if I should find cause to do so, the man shall never put foot in my house again."

"Then I think that I am rid of him," said Rachel, with a sigh of relief, "only be careful, dear, that he does not do you a mischief, for such men do not like to be found out." Then she left the stoep, and went to tell her mother all that had happened.

When she had heard the story, Mrs. Dove, who detested Ishmael as much as her daughter did, tried to persuade her husband not to visit his kraal, saying that it would only breed a feud, and that under the circumstances, it would be easy to forbid him the house upon other grounds. But Mr. Dove, obstinate as usual, refused to listen to her, saying that he would not judge the man without evidence, and that of the natives could not be relied on. Also, if the tale were true, it was his duty as his spiritual adviser to remonstrate with him.

So his poor wife gave up arguing, as she always did, and long before dawn on the following morning, Mr. Dove, accompanied by two guides, departed upon his errand.

After he had ridden some twelve miles across the plain which lay behind Ramah, just at daybreak, he reached a pass or nek between two swelling hills, beyond which the guides said lay the kraal that was called Mafooti. Presently he saw it, a place situated in a cup-like valley, chosen evidently because the approaches to it were easy to defend. On a knoll in the centre of this rich valley stood the kraal, a small native town surrounded by walls, and stone enclosures full of cattle. As they approached the kraal, from its main entrance issued four or five good-looking native women, one of them accompanied by a boy, and all carrying hoes in their hands, for they were going out at sunrise to work in the mealie fields. When they saw Mr. Dove they stood still, staring at him, till he called to them not to be afraid, and riding up, asked them who they were.

"We are of the number of the wives of Ibubesi,

the Lion," answered their spokeswoman, who held the little boy by the hand.

"Do you mean the *Umlungu* (that is, the white man), Ishmael?" he asked again.

"Whom else should we mean?" she answered. "I am his head wife, now that he has put away old Mami, and this is his son. If the light were stronger you would see that he is almost white," she added, with pride.

Mr. Dove knew not what to answer; this intelligence overwhelmed him, and he sat silent on his horse. The wives of Ishmael prepared to pass on to the mealie fields, then stopped, and began to whisper together. At length the mother of the boy turned and addressed him, while the others crowded behind her to listen.

"We desire to ask you a question, Teacher," she said, somewhat shyly, for evidently they knew well enough who he was. "Is it true that we are to have a new sister?"

"A new sister! What do you mean?" asked Mr. Dove.

"We mean, Teacher," she replied smiling, "that we have heard that Ibubesi is courting the beautiful Zoola, the daughter of your head wife, and we thought that perhaps you had come to arrange about the cattle that he must pay for her. Doubtless if she is so fair, it will be a whole herd."

This was too much, even for Mr. Dove.

"How dare you talk so, you heathen hussies?" he gasped. "Where is the white man?"

"Teacher," she replied with indignation, and drawing herself up, "why do you call us bad names? We are respectable women, the wives of one husband, as respectable as your own, although not so numerous, or, so we hear from Ibubesi. If you desire to see him, he is in the big hut, yonder, with our youngest sister, she whom he married last month. We wish you good-

day, as we go to hoe our lord's fields, and we hope that when she comes, the Inkosazana, your daughter, will not be as rude as you are, for if so, how shall we love her as we wish to do?" Then wrapping her blanket round her with a dignified air, the offended lady stalked off, followed by her various "sisters."

As for Mr. Dove, who for once in his life was in a towering rage, he cut his horse viciously with the sjambok, or hippopotamus-hide whip, which he carried, and followed by his guides, galloped forward to a big hut in the centre of the kraal.

Apparently Ishmael heard the sound of his horse's hoofs, for as the missionary was dismounting he crawled out of the bee-hole of the hut upon his hands and knees, as a Kaffir does, followed by a young woman in the lightest of attire, who was yawning as though she had just been aroused from sleep. What is more, except for the colour of his skin, he *was* a Kaffir and nothing else, for his costume consisted of a skin moocha such as the natives wear, and a fur kaross thrown over his shoulders. Straightening himself, Ishmael saw for the first time who was his visitor. His jaw dropped, and he uttered an ejaculation that need not be recorded, then stood silent. Mr. Dove was silent also; for his wrath would not allow him to speak.

"How do you do, sir?" Ishmael jerked out at last. "You are an early visitor, and find me somewhat unprepared. If I had known that you were coming I would—" then suddenly he remembered his attire, or the lack of it, also his companion who was leaning on his shoulder, and peeping at the white man over it. Drawing the kaross tightly about him, he gave the poor girl a backward kick, and with a Kaffir oath bade her begone, then went on hurriedly: "I am afraid my dress is not quite what you are accustomed to, but among these poor heathens I find it necessary to conform more or less to their ways

in order to gain their confidence and—um—affection. Will you come into the hut? My servant there will get you some *tywala* (Kaffir beer)—I mean some *amasi* (curdled milk) at once, and I will have a calf killed for breakfast."

Mr. Dove could bear it no longer.

"Ishmael, or Smith, or Ibubesi—whichever name you may prefer," he broke out, "do not lie to me about your servant, for now I know all the truth, which I refused to believe when my daughter and Nonha told it me. You are a black-hearted villain. But yesterday you dared to come and ask Rachel to marry you, and now I find that you are living—oh! I cannot say it, it makes me ashamed of my race. Listen to me, sir. If ever you dare to set foot in Ramah again, or to speak to my wife and daughter, the Kaffirs shall whip you off the place. Indeed," he added, shaking his sjambok in Ishmael's face, "although I am an older man than you are, were it not for my office I would give you the thrashing you deserve."

At first Ishmael had shrunk beneath this torrent of invective, but the threat of violence roused his fierce nature. His face grew evil, and his long black hair and beard bristled with wrath.

"You had best get out of this, you prayer-snuffling old humbug," he said savagely, "for if you stop much longer I will make you sing another tune. We have sea-cow whips here, too, and you shall learn what a hiding means, such a hiding that your own family won't know you, if you live to get back to them. Look here, I offered to marry your daughter on the square, and I meant what I said. I'd have got rid of all this black baggage, and she should have been the only one. Well, I'll marry her yet, only now she'll just take her place with the others. We are all one flesh and blood, black and white, ain't we? I have often heard you preach it. So what will she

have to complain of?" he sneered. "She can go and hoe mealies like the rest."

As this brutal talk fell upon his ears Mr. Dove's reason departed from him entirely. After all, he was an English gentleman first, and a clergyman afterwards; also he loved his daughter, and to hear her spoken of like this was intolerable to him, as it would have been to any father. Lifting the sjambok he cut Ishmael across the mouth so sharply that the blood came from his lips, then suddenly remembering that this deed would probably mean his death, stood still awaiting the issue. As it chanced it did not, for the man, like most brutes and bullies, was a coward, as Rachel had already found out. Obeying his first impulse he sprang at the clergyman with an oath, then seeing that his two guides, who carried assegais, had ranged themselves beside him, checked himself, for he feared lest those spears should pierce his heart.

"You are in my house," he said, wiping the blood from his beard, "and an old man, so I can't kill you as I would anyone else. But you have made me your enemy now, you fool, and others can. I have protected you so far for your daughter's sake, but I won't do it any longer. You think of that when your time comes."

"My time, like yours, will come when God wills," answered Mr. Dove unflinchingly, "not when you or anyone else wills. I do not fear you in the least. Still, I am sorry that I struck you, it was a sin of which I repent as I pray that you may repent."

Then he mounted his horse and rode away from the kraal Mafooti.

When Mr. Dove reached Ramah he only said to Rachel that what she had heard was quite true, and that he had forbidden Ishmael the house. Of course, however, Noie soon learnt the whole story from the Kaffir guides, and repeated it to her mistress.

To his wife, on the other hand, he told everything, with the result that she was very much disturbed. She pointed out to him that this white outcast was a most dangerous man, who would certainly be revenged upon them in one way or another. Again she implored him, as she had often done before, to leave these savage countries wherein he had laboured for all the best years of his life, saying it was not right that he should expose their daughter to the risks of them.

"But," answered her husband, "you have often told me that you were sure no harm would come to Rachel, and I think that too."

"Yes, dear, I am sure; still, for many reasons it does not seem right to keep her here." She did not add, poor, unselfish woman, that there was another who should be considered as well as Rachel.

"How can I go away," he went on excitedly, "just when all the seed that I have sown is ripening to harvest? If I did so, my work would be utterly lost, and my people relapse into barbarism again. I am not afraid of this man, or of anything that he can do to my body, but if I ran away from him it would be injuring my soul, and what account should I give of my cowardice when my time comes? Do you go, my love, and take Rachel with you if you wish, leaving me to finish my work alone."

But now, as before, Mrs. Dove would not go, and Rachel, when she was asked, shrugged her shoulders and answered laughing that she was not afraid of anybody or anything, and, except for her mother's sake, did not care whether she went or stayed. Certainly she would not leave her, nor, she added, did she wish to say good-bye to Africa.

When she was asked why, she replied vaguely that she had grown up there, and it was her home. But her mother, watching her, knew well enough that she had another reason, although no word of it ever passed her lips. In Africa she had met Richard Darrien

as a child, and in Africa and nowhere else she believed she would meet him again as a woman.

The weeks and months went by, bringing to the Ramah household no sight or tidings of the white man, Ishmael. They heard through the Kaffirs, indeed, that although he still kept his kraal at Mafooti, he himself had gone away on some trading journey far to the north, and did not expect to return for a year, news at which everyone rejoiced, except Noie, who shook her wise little head and said nothing.

So all fear of the man gradually died away, and things were very peaceful and prosperous at Ramah.

In fact this quiet proved to be but the lull before the storm.

One day, about eight months after Mr. Dove had visited the kraal Mafooti, another embassy came to Rachel from the Zulu king, Dingaan, bringing with it a present of more white cattle. She received them as she had done before, at night and alone, for they refused to speak to her in the presence of other people.

In substance their petition was the same that it had been before, namely, that she would visit Zululand, as the king and his indunas desired her counsel upon an important matter. When asked what this matter was they either were, or pretended to be, ignorant, saying that it had not been confided to them. Thereon she said that if Dingaan chose to submit the question to her by messenger, she would give him her opinion on it, but that she could not come to his kraal. They asked why, seeing that the whole nation would guard her, and no hair of her head be harmed.

"Because I am a child in the house of my people, and they will not allow me to leave even for a day," she answered, thinking that this reply would appeal to a race who believe absolutely in obedience to parents and every established authority.

"Is it so?" remarked the old induna who spoke

as Dingaan's Mouth—not Mopo, but another. "Now, how can the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, before whom a whole nation will bow, be in bonds to a white *Umfundusi*, a mere sky-doctor? Shall the wide heavens obey a cloud?"

"If they are bred of that cloud," retorted Rachel.

"The heavens breed the cloud, not the cloud the heavens," answered the induna aptly.

Now it occurred to Rachel that this thing was going further than it should. To be set up as a kind of guardian spirit to the Zulus had seemed a very good joke, and naturally appealed to the love of power which is common to women. But when it involved, at any rate in the eyes of that people, dominion over her own parents, the joke was, she felt, becoming serious. So she determined suddenly to bring it to an end.

"What mean you, Messenger of the King?" she asked. "I am but the child of my parents, and the parents are greater than the child, and must be obeyed of her."

"Inkosazana," answered the old man with a deprecatory smile, "if it pleases you to tell us such tales, our ears must listen, as if it pleased you to order us to be killed, we must be killed. But learn that we know the truth. We know how as a child you came down from above in the lightning, and how these white people with whom you dwell found you lying in the mist on the mountain top, and took you to their home in place of a babe whom they had buried."

"Who told you that story?" asked Rachel amazed.

"It was revealed to the council of the doctors, Lady."

"Then that was revealed which is not true. I was born as other women are, and my name of 'Lady of the Heavens' came to me by chance, as by chance I resemble the Spirit of your people."

"We hear you," answered the "Mouth" politely.

"You were born as other women are, by chance you had your high name, by chance you are tall and fair and golden-haired like the Spirit of our people. We hear you."

Then Rachel gave it up.

"Bear my words to the King," she said, and they rose, saluted her with a Bayète, that royal salute which never before had been given to woman, and departed.

When they had gone Rachel went in to supper and told her parents all the story. Mr. Dove, now that she seemed to take a serious view of the matter, affected to treat it as absurd, although when she had laughed, his attitude, it may be remembered, was different. He talked of the silly Zulu superstitions, showed how they had twisted up the story of the death of her baby brother, and her escape from the flood in the Umtavuna river, into that which they had narrated to her. He even suggested that the whole thing was nonsense, part of some political move to enable the King, or a party in the state, to declare that they had with them the word of their traditional Spirit and oracle.

Mrs. Dove, however, who that night was strangely depressed and uneasy, thought far otherwise. She pointed out that they were playing with vast and cruel forces, and that whatever these people exactly believed about Rachel, it was a dreadful thing for a girl to be put in a position in which the lives of hundreds might hang upon her nod.

"Yes, and," she added hysterically, "perhaps our own lives also—perhaps our own lives also!"

To change the conversation, which was growing painful, Rachel asked if anyone had seen Noie. Her father answered that two hours ago, just before the embassy arrived, he had met her going down to the banks of the stream, as he supposed, to gather flowers for the table. Then he began to talk about the girl, saying what a sweet creature she was,

and how strange it seemed to him that although she appeared to accept all the doctrines of the Christian faith, as yet she had never consented to be baptised.

It was while he was speaking thus that Rachel suddenly observed her mother fall forward, so that her body rested on the table, as though a kind of fit had seized her. Rachel sprang towards her, but before she reached her she appeared to have quite recovered, only her face looked very white.

"What on earth is the matter, mother?"

"Oh! don't ask me," she answered, "a terrible thing, a sort of fancy that came to me from talking about those Zulus. I thought I saw this place all red with blood and tongues of fire licking it up. It went as quickly as it came, and of course I know that it is nonsense."

CHAPTER IX

THE TAKING OF NOIE

PRESENTLY Mrs. Dove, who seemed to have quite recovered from her curious seizure, went to bed.

"I don't like it, father," said Rachel when the door had closed behind her. "Of course it is contrary to experience and all that, but I believe that mother is fore-sighted."

"Nonsense, dear, nonsense," said her father. "It is her Scotch superstition, that is all. We have been married for five-and-twenty years now, and I have heard this sort of thing again and again, but although we have lived in wild places where anything might happen to us, nothing out of the way ever has happened; in fact, we have always been most mercifully preserved."

"That's true, father, still I am not sure; perhaps because I am rather that way myself, sometimes. Thus I *know* that she is right about me; no harm will happen to me, at least no permanent harm. I feel that I shall live out my life, as I feel something else."

"What else, Rachel?"

"Do you remember the lad, Richard Darrien?" she asked, colouring a little.

"What? The boy who was with you that night on the island? Yes, I remember him, although I have not thought of him for years."

"Well, I feel that I shall see him again."

Mr. Dove laughed. "Is that all?" he said. "If he is still alive and in Africa, it wouldn't be very

wonderful if you did, would it? And at any rate, of course, you will one day when we all cease to be alive. Really," he added with irritation, "there are enough bothers in life without rubbish of this kind, which comes from living among savages and absorbing their ideas. I am beginning to think that I shall have to give way and leave Africa, though it will break my heart just when, after all the striving, my efforts are being crowned with success."

"I have always told you, father, that I don't want to leave Africa; still, there is mother to be considered. Her health is not what it was."

"Well," he said impatiently, "I will talk to her and weigh the thing. Perhaps I shall receive guidance, though for my part I cannot see what it matters. We've got to die some time, and if necessary I prefer that it should be while doing my duty. 'Take no thought for the morrow, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' has always been my motto, who am content with what it pleases Providence to send me."

Then Rachel, seeing no use in continuing the conversation, bade him good-night, and went to look for Noie, only to discover that she was not in the house. This disturbed her very much, although it occurred to her that she might possibly be with friends in the village, hiding till she was sure the Zulu embassy had gone. So she went to bed without troubling her father.

At daybreak next morning she rose, not having slept very well, and went out to look for the girl, without success, for no one had heard or seen anything of her. As she was returning to the house, however, she met a solitary Zulu, a dignified middle-aged man, whom she thought she recognised as one of the embassy, although of this she could not be sure, as she had only seen these people in the moonlight. The man, who was quite unarmed, except for a kerry which he carried, crouched down on catching sight of her in token of

respect. As she approached he rose, and gave he the royal salute. Then she was sure.

"Speak," she said.

"Inkosazana," he answered humbly, "be not angry with me, I am Tamboosa, one of the King's indunas. You saw me with the others last night."

"I saw you."

"Inkosazana, there has been dwelling with you one Noie, the daughter of Seyapi the wizard, who with all his house was slain at this place by order of the King. She also should have been slain, but we have learned that you called down lightning from Heaven, and that with it you slew the soldier who had run her down, slew him and burned him up, as you had the right to do, and took the girl to be your slave, as you had the right to do."

"Speak on," said Rachel, showing none of the surprise which she felt.

"Inkosazana, we know that you have come to love this girl. Therefore, yesterday before we spoke with you we seized her as we were commanded, and hid her away, awaiting your answer to our message. Had you consented to visit the King at his Great Place, we would have let her go. But as you did not consent my companions have taken her to the King."

"An ill deed. What more, Tamboosa?"

"This; the King says by my mouth—Let the Inkosazana come and command, and her servant Noie shall go free and unharmed, for is she not a dog in her hut? But if she comes not and at once, then the girl dies."

"How know I that this tale is true, Tamboosa?" asked Rachel, controlling herself with an effort, for she loved Noie dearly.

The man turned towards some bushes that grew at a distance of about twenty paces, and cried: "Come hither."

Thereon from among the bushes where she lay

hidden, rose a little maid of about fourteen, whom Rachel knew well as a girl that Noie often took with her to carry baskets and other things.

"Tell now the tale of the taking of Noie and deliver the message that she gave to you," commanded Tamboosa.

Thereon the trembling child began, and after the native fashion, suppressing no detail or circumstance, however small, narrated how the Zulus had surprised her and Noie while they were gathering flowers, and having bound their arms, had caused them to be hurried away unseen to some dense bush about four miles off. Here they had been kept hidden till in the night the embassy returned. Then they had spoken with Noie, who in the end called her and gave her a message. This was the message: "Say to the Inkosazana that the Zulus have caught me, and are taking me to Dingaan the King. Say that they declare that if she is pleased to come and speak the word, I shall be set free unharmed, that is, if she comes at once. But if she does not come, then I shall be killed. Say to her that I do not ask that she should come who am ready to die, and that though I believe that no harm will happen to her in Zululand, I think that she had better not come. Say that, living or dead, I love her."

Then the maid described how the embassy went on with Noie, leaving her in the charge of the man Tamboosa, who at the first break of dawn brought her back to Ramah, and made her hide in the bush.

Now Rachel had no more doubts. Clearly the tale was true, and the question was—what must be done? She thought a while, then bade Tamboosa and the child to follow her to the mission-house. On the stoep she found her father and mother sitting in the sun and drinking coffee, after the South African fashion.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Dove, looking at the man anxiously.

Rachel ordered him to repeat his story, and this he did, addressing Rachel alone, for of her father and mother he would take no notice. When he had done the child told her tale also.

"Go now, and wait without," said Rachel, when it was finished.

"Inkosazana, I go," answered the man, "but if it pleases you to save your servant, know that you must come swiftly. If you are not across the Tugela by sunset this night, word will be passed to the King, and she dies at once. Know also that you must come alone with me, for if any, white or black, accompany you, they will be killed."

"Now," said Rachel when the three of them were left alone, "now what is to be done?"

Mrs. Dove shook her head helplessly, and looked at her husband, who broke into a tirade against the Zulus, their superstitions, cruelties, customs, and everything that was theirs, and ended by declaring that it was of course utterly impossible that Rachel should go upon such a mad errand, and thus place herself in the power of savages.

"But, father," she said when he had done, "do you understand that you are pronouncing Noie's death sentence? If you were in my place, would you not go?"

"Of course I would. In fact I propose to do so as it is. No doubt Dingaan will listen to me."

"You mean that Dingaan will kill you. Did you not hear what that man, Tamboosa, said? Father, you must not go."

"No, John," broke in Mrs. Dove, "Rachel is right, you must not go, for you would never come back again. Also, how can you be so cruel as to think of leaving me here alone?"

"Then I suppose that we must abandon that poor girl to her fate," exclaimed Mr. Dove.

"How can you suppose anything so merciless, father, when it is in my power to save her?" asked Rachel. "If I let those horrible Zulus kill her I shall never be happy again all my life."

"And what if the horrible Zulus kill you?"

"They will not kill me, father; mother knows they will not, and so do I. But as they have got this madness into their heads, I am sure that if I do not go they will send an impi here to kill everybody else, and take me prisoner. The kidnapping of Noie is only a first move. It is one of two things: either I must visit Zululand, save Noie, and play my part there as best I can, or we must desert Noie, and all leave this place at once, to-morrow if possible. But then, as I told you, I shall never forgive myself, especially as I am not in the least afraid of the Zulus."

"It is true that God can protect you as much in Zululand as He can here," replied Mr. Dove, beginning to weaken in face of this desperate alternative.

"Of course, father, but if I go to Zululand I want you and mother to trek to Durban, and remain there till I return."

"Why, Rachel? It is absurd."

"Because I do not think that you are safe here, and it is not at all absurd," she answered stubbornly. "These people choose to believe that I am in some way in bondage to you; you remember all their talk about the heavens and the cloud. Of course it may mean nothing, but you will be much better in Durban for a while, where you can take to the water if necessary."

Now Mr. Dove's obstinacy asserted itself. He refused to entertain any such idea, giving reason after reason why he should not do so. Thus for another half hour the argument raged till at length a compromise was arrived at, as usual in such cases, not of too satisfactory an order. Rachel was to be allowed

to undertake her mission on behalf of Noie, and her parents were to remain at Ramah. On her return, which they hoped would be within a week or eight days, the question of the abandonment of the mission was to be settled by the help of the experience she had gained. To this arrangement, then, they agreed, reluctantly enough all of them, in order to save Noie's life, and for no other reason.

The momentous decision once taken, in half an hour Rachel was ready for her journey, which she determined she would make upon her own horse, a grey mare that she had ridden for a long while, and could rely on in every way. The white riding-ox that Dingaan had sent as a present was also to accompany her, to carry her spare garments and other articles packed in skin bags, such as coffee, sugar and a few medicines, and to serve as a remount in case anything should happen to the horse. When it was laden Rachel sent for the Zulu, Tamboosa, and pointing to the ox, said:

"I come to visit Dingaan the king, and to claim my servant. Lead the beast on, I will overtake you presently."

The man saluted and began to *bonga*, that is, to give her titles of praise, but she cut him short with a wave of her hand, and he departed leading the ox.

Now while Mr. Dove saw to the saddling of the horses, for he was to ride with her as far as the Tugela, Rachel went to bid farewell to her mother. She found her by herself in the sitting-room, seated at an open window, and looking out sadly towards the sea.

"I am quite ready, dear," she said in a cheerful voice. "Don't look so sad, I shall be back again in a week with Noie."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Dove, "I think that you and Noie will come back safely, but——" and she paused.

"But what, mother?"

"Oh! I don't know. I am very much oppressed, my heart is heavy in me. I hate parting with you, Rachel. Remember we have never been separated since you were born."

Her daughter looked at her, and was filled with grief and compunction.

"Mother," she said, "if you feel like that—well, I love Noie, but after all you are more to me than Noie, and if you wish I will give up this business and stop with you. It is very terrible, but it can't be helped; Noie will understand, poor thing," and her eyes filled with tears at the thought of the girl's dreadful fate.

"No, Rachel, somehow I think it best that you should go, not only for Noie's sake, but for your own. If your father would leave here to-day or to-morrow, as you suggested, it might be otherwise, but he won't do that, so it is no use talking of it. Let us hope for the best."

"As you wish, mother."

"Now, dear, kiss me and go. I hear your father calling you; and, Rachel, if we should not meet again in this world, I know you won't forget me, or that there is another where we shall. I did not want to frighten you with my fancies, which come from my not being well. Good-bye, my love, good-bye. God be with you, and make you happy, always—always."

Then Rachel kissed her in silence, for she could not trust herself to speak, and turning, left the room whence her mother watched her go, also in silence. In another minute she was mounted, and, accompanied by her father, riding on the road along which Tamboosa had led the white ox.

Presently they overtook him, whereon he stopped, and looking at Mr. Dove, said:

"Inkosazana, the King's orders are that none should accompany you into Zululand."

"Be silent," answered Rachel, proudly. "He rides with me as far as the river bank."

Then they went on, and Rachel was relieved to find that whatever might have been her mother's mood, that of her father was fairly cheerful. Indeed, his mind was so occupied with the details and object of her journey that he quite forgot its dangers.

Two hours' steady riding brought them to the ford of the Tugela river, across which lay Zululand. On the hills beyond it they could see a number of Kaffirs watching, who on catching sight of Rachel, ran down to the river and entered it, shouting and beating the water with their sticks, as she guessed, to scare away any crocodiles that might be lurking there.

Now that the moment of separation had come, Mr. Dove grew loth to part with his daughter, and again suggested to Tamboosa that he should accompany her to Dingaan's Great Place.

"If you set a foot across that river, Praying Man," answered the induna grimly, "you shall die; look, there are the spears that will kill you."

As he spoke he pointed to the crest of the opposing hill over which, running swiftly in ordered companies, now appeared a Zulu regiment who carried large white shields and wore white plumes rising from their head rings.

"It is the escort of the Inkosazana," he added. "Do you think that she can take hurt among so many? And do you think, if you dare to disobey the words of Dingaan, that you can escape so many? Go back now, lest they should come over and kill you where you are."

Then, seeing that both argument and resistance were useless, and that Tamboosa would brook no delay, Mr. Dove hurriedly embraced his daughter in farewell. Indeed, Rachel was glad that there was no time for words, for this parting was more terrible to her than she cared to own, and she feared lest she should break down before the Zulu who was watching

her, and thereby be lowered in his eyes and in those of his people.

It was over and done. She had entered the water, riding her grey mare while Tamboosa led the white ox at her side. Presently she looked back, and saw her father kneeling in prayer upon the bank.

"What does the man?" asked Tamboosa, uneasily. "Is he bewitching us?"

"Nay," she answered, "he prays to the Heavens for us."

On they went between the two lines of natives, who ceased their beating of the water, and were silent as she passed. The river was shallow, and they crossed it with ease. By now the regiment was gathered on its further bank, two thousand men or more, brought hither to do honour to this white girl in whom they chose to consider that the guardian spirit of their people was incarnate. Contemplating them, Rachel wondered how it came about that they should be thus prepared for her advent. The answer rose in her mind. If she had refused to visit Zululand, it was their mission to fetch her. It was wise, therefore, that she had come of her own will.

Forward she rode, a striking figure in her long white cloak, down which her bright hair hung, sitting very proud and upright on her horse, without a sign of doubt or fear. As she approached, the captains of the regiment ran forward to meet her with lifted shields and crouching bodies.

"Hail!" cried their leader. "In the name of the Great Elephant, of Dingaan the King, hail to thee, Princess of the Heavens, Holder of the Spirit of Nomkubulwana."

Rachel rode on, taking no notice, marvelling who Nomkubulwana, whose spirit she was supposed to enshrine, might be. Afterwards she discovered that it was only another name for the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, that mysterious white ghost believed by this people

to control their destinies, with whom it had pleased them to identify her. As her horse left the wide river and set foot upon dry land, every man of the two thousand soldiers, who were watching, as it seemed to her, with wonder and awe, began to beat his ox-hide shield with the handle of his spear. They beat very softly at first, producing a sound like the distant murmur of the sea, then harder and harder till its volume grew to a mighty roar, impossible to describe, a sound like the sound of thunder that echoed along the water and from hill to hill. The mighty noise sank and died away as it had begun, and for a moment there was silence. Then at some signal every spear flashed aloft in the sunlight, and from every throat came the royal salute—*Bayète.* It was a tremendous and most imposing welcome, so tremendous that Rachel could no longer doubt that this people regarded her as a being apart, and above the other white folk whom they knew.

At the time, however, she had little space for such thoughts, since the mare she rode, terrified by the tumult, bucked and shied so violently that she could scarcely keep her seat. She was a good rider, which was fortunate for her, since, had she been ignominiously thrown upon such an occasion, her prestige must have suffered, if indeed it were not destroyed. As it proved, it was greatly enhanced by this accident. Many of the Zulus of that day had never even seen a horse, which was considered by all of them to be a dangerous if not a magical beast. That a woman could remain seated on such a wild animal when it sprang into the air, and swerved from side to side, struck them, therefore, as something marvellous and out of experience, a proof indeed that she was not as others are.

She quieted the mare, and rode on between the white-shielded ranks, who, their greeting finished, remained absolutely still like bronze statues watching her with wondering eyes. When at length they were

passed, the captains and a guard of about fifty men ran ahead of her. Then she came, and after her Tamboosa, leading the white ox, followed by another guard, which in turn was followed by the entire regiment. Thus royally escorted, asking no questions, and speaking no word, did Rachel make her entry into Zululand. Only in her heart she wondered whither she was going, and how that strange journey would end, wondered, too, how it would fare with her father and her mother till she returned to them.

Well might she wonder.

When she had ridden thus for about two hours an incident occurred which showed her how great, and indeed how dreadful was the eminence on which she had been set among these people. Suddenly some cattle, frightened by the approach of the impi, rushed through it towards their kraal, and a bull that was with them, seeing this unaccustomed apparition of a white woman mounted on a strange animal, put down its head and charged her furiously. She saw it coming, and by pulling the mare on to its haunches, avoided its rush. Now at the time she was riding on a path which ran along the edge of a little rock-strewn donga not more than eight or ten feet deep, but steep-sided. Into this donga the bull, which had shut its eyes to charge after the fashion of its kind, plunged headlong, and as it chanced struck its horns against a stone, twisting and dislocating the neck, so that it lay there still and dead.

When the Zulus saw what had happened they uttered a long-drawn *Ow-w* of amazement, for had not the beast dared to attack the White Spirit, and had not the Spirit rewarded it with instant death? Then a captain made a motion with his hand and instantly men sprang upon the remaining cattle, four or five of them that were following the bull, and despatched them with assegais. Before Rachel could interfere

they were pierced with a hundred wounds. Now there was a little pause, while the carcases of the beasts were dragged out of her path, and the blood-stains covered from her eyes with fresh earth. Just as this task was finished there appeared, scrambling up the donga, and followed by some men, a fat and hideous-looking woman, with fish bladders in her hair, and snake-skins tied about her, who, from her costume, Rachel knew at once must be an *Isanuzi* or witch-doctoress. Evidently she was in a fury, as might be seen by the workings of her face, and the extraordinary swiftness with which she moved notwithstanding her years and bulk.

"Who has dared to kill my cattle?" she screamed. "Is it thou whom men name Nomkubulwana?"

"Woman," answered Rachel quietly, "the Heavens killed the bull which would have hurt me. For the rest, ask of the captains of the King."

The witch-doctoress glanced at the dead bull which lay in the donga, its head twisted up in an unnatural fashion at right angles to the body, and for a moment seemed afraid. Then her rage at the loss of her herd broke out afresh, for she was a person in authority, one accustomed to be feared because of her black arts and her office.

"When the Inkosazana is seen in Zululand," she gasped, "death walks with her. There is the token of it," and she pointed to the dead cattle. "So it has ever been and so shall it ever be. Red is thy road through life, White One. Go back, go back now to thine own kraal, and see whether or no my words are true," and springing at the horse she seized it by the bridle as though she would drag it round.

Now in her hand Rachel held a little rod of white rhinoceros horn which she used as a riding whip, and with this rod she pointed at the woman, meaning that some of those with her should cause her to loose the bridle. Too late she remembered that in this

savage land such a motion when made by the King or one in supreme command, had another dreadful interpretation—death without pity or reprieve.

In an instant, before she could interfere, before she could speak, the witch-doctoress lay dead upon the carcase of the dead bull.

"What of the others, Queen, what of the others?" asked the chief of the slayers, bending low before her, and pointing with his spear to the attendants of the witch-doctoress, who fled aghast. "Do they join this evil-doer who dared to lift her hand against thee?"

"Nay," she answered in a low voice, for horror had made her almost dumb. "I give them life. Forward."

"She gives them life!" shouted the praisers about her. "The Bearer of life and death gives life to the children of the evil-doer," and as the great cavalcade marched forward, company after company took up these words and sang them as a song.

CHAPTER X

THE OMEN OF THE STAR

As it chanced and can easily be understood, Rachel could not have made a more effective entry into Zululand, or one more calculated to confirm her supernatural reputation. When the "wild beast" she rode plunged about she had remained seated on it as though she grew there, whereas every warrior knew that he would have fallen off. When the bull charged her that bull had died, slain by the Heavens. When the Isanuzi, a witch of repute, had lifted voice and hand against her she had commanded her death, showing that she feared no rival magic. True the woman would have been killed in any case, for such was the order of the King as to all who should dare to affront the Inkosazana, yet the captains had waited to see what Rachel would do that they might judge her accordingly. If she had shown fear, if she had even neglected to avenge, they might have marvelled whether after all she were more than a beautiful white maiden filled with the wisdom of the whites.

Now they knew better; she was a Spirit having the power of a Spirit over beast and man, who smote as a Spirit should. The fame of it went throughout the land, and little chance thenceforward had Rachel of escaping from the shadow of her own fearful renown.

Towards sundown they came to a kraal set upon a hill, and it was asked of her if she were pleased to spend the night there. She bowed her head in assent, and they entered the kraal. It was quite empty save

for certain maidens dressed in bead petticoats, who waited there to serve her. All the other inhabitants had gone. They took her to a large and beautifully clean hut. Kneeling on their knees the maidens presented her with food—meat and curdled milk, and roasted cobs of corn. She ate of the corn and the milk, but the meat she sent away as a gift to the captains. Then alone in that kraal, in which after they had served her even the girls seemed to fear to stay, Rachel slept as best she might in such solitude, while without the fence two thousand armed savages watched over her safety.

It was a troubled sleep, for she dreamed always of that dreadful-looking Isanuzi with the fish-bladders in her hair, yelling to her that her path through life was watered with blood, and bidding her go back to her own kraal and see whether the words were true, an ominous saying of which she could not read the riddle. She dreamed also of the woman's coarse, furious face turned suddenly to one of abject terror, and then of the dreadful end—the red death without mercy and without appeal which she had let loose by a motion of her hand. Another dream she had was of her father and her mother, who seemed to be lying side by side staring towards her with wide-open eyes, and that when she spoke to them they would not answer.

So the long night wore away, till at length Rachel woke with a start thinking that a hand had been laid upon her face, to see by the faint light of dawn which struggled into the hut through the cracks of the door-boards, that the hand was only a great rat that had crawled over her and now nibbled at her hair. She sat up, frightening it and its companions away, then rose and washed herself with water that stood by in great gourds, while without she heard the women singing some kind of song or hymn of which she could not catch the words.

Scarcely was she ready than they entered the hut,

saluting her and bringing more food. Rachel ate, then bade one of them say to the captain of the impi that she was ready to start. Presently the girl returned with the message that all was prepared. She walked from the kraal to find her mare, which had been well fed and groomed by Tamboosa, who had seen horses in Natal, and knew how they should be treated, saddled and waiting, whilst before and behind it, arranged as on the previous day, stood the warriors, who received her in dead, respectful silence.

She mounted, and the procession went forward. With a two hours' halt at midday they marched on over hill and dale, passing many villages of beehive shaped huts. As they came the inhabitants of these places deserted them and fled, crying "*Nomkubulwana! Nomkubulwana!*" It was evident to Rachel that the tale of the death of the Isanuzi had preceded her, and they feared lest, should they cross her path, her fate would be their fate. Indeed one of the strangest circumstances of this strange adventure was the complete loneliness in which she lived. Except those who were actually ordered to wait upon her, none dared come near to Rachel; she was holy, a Spirit, to approach whom unbidden might mean death.

At nightfall they reached another empty kraal, where again she slept alone. When they left it in the morning she called Tamboosa to her and asked him at what hour they would come to Dingaan's great town, Umgugundhlovo, which means the Place of the trumpeting of the Elephant. He answered, at sunset.

So she rode on all that day also till as the sun began to sink, from a hill whereon grew large euphorbia trees, on a plain backed by mountains she saw the town surrounded by a fence inside of which were thousands of huts, that in their turn surrounded a great open space. Now they pushed forward quickly, and as darkness fell approached the main gate of the

place where, as usual, there was no one to be seen. But here they did not enter, marching on till they came to another gate, that of the Intunkulu, the King's house, where, their escort done, the regiment turned and went away, leaving Rachel alone with the envoy, Tamboosa, who still led the white ox. They entered this gate, and presently came to a second. It was that of the Emposeni, the Dwelling of the King's wives, out of which appeared women crawling on the ground before Rachel, and holding in their left hands torches of grass. These undid the baggage from the ox, and at their signals, for they did not seem to dare to speak to her, Rachel dismounted. Thereon Tamboosa saluted her, and taking the horse by the bridle, led it away with the ox.

Then Rachel felt that she was indeed alone, for Tamboosa at any rate had seen her home, which now was so far away. Still proudly enough she followed the women, who, bent double as before, led her to a great hut lit by a rude lamp filled with melted hippopotamus fat, where they set down her bags, and departed, to return presently with food and water.

Having washed off the dust of her long journey, and combed out her hair, Rachel ate all she could, for she was hungry, and guessed that she might need her strength that night. Then she lay down upon a pile of beautiful karosses that had been placed ready for her, and rested. An hour or more went by, and just as she was beginning to fall asleep, the doorboard of the hut was thrust aside, and a tall woman entered, who knelt to her and said:

"Hail Inkosazana! The King asks whether it be thy pleasure to appear before him this night."

"It is my pleasure," answered Rachel, "for that purpose have I travelled here. Lead me to the King."

So the woman went out of the hut, Rachel following her to find that the moon shone brightly in a clear sky. The woman conducted her through tortuous

reed fences, until presently they came to an open court where in the shadow of a hut sat a number of men wrapped about with fur karosses. Guessing that she was in the presence of Dingaan, Rachel drew her white cloak round her tall form and walked forward slowly, till she reached the centre of the space, where she stopped and stood quite still, looking like a ghost in the moonlight. Then all the men to right and left rose and saluted her silently by the uplifting of one arm, only he who was in the midst of them remained seated, and did not salute. Still she stayed motionless, uttering no word for a long while, six or seven minutes, perhaps. Her silence fought against theirs, and she knew that the one who spoke first would own to inferiority.

At length, in answering salutation, she lifted the little wand of white horn that she carried and turned slowly as though to leave the place, so that now the moonlight glistened on her lovely hair. Then, fearing perhaps lest she should depart or vanish away, the man seated in the centre said in a low, half-awed voice:

"I am Dingaan, King of the Amazulu. Say, White One, who art thou?"

"By what name am I known here, O Dingaan the King?" she replied, answering the question with a question.

"By a high name, White One, a name that is seldom spoken, the name of Inkosazana-y-Zoola, the title of Nomkubulwana, the Spirit of our people. How camest thou by that name?"

"My name is my name," she said.

"We know, White One; the wind has borne all that story through the land, it whispers it from the leaves of the forest and the reeds of the water and the grass of the plains. We know that the Heavens gave thee their own name, O Child of Heaven, O Holder of the Spirit of Nomkubulwana."

"Thou sayest it, King. I do not say it, thou sayest it."

"I say it, and having seen thee I know that it is true, for thy beauty, White One, is not the beauty of woman alone, although still thou beest woman. Now I confirm to thee the words my messengers bore thee in past days. Here, with me, thou rulest. The land is thine, my impis wait thy word. Death and life are in thy hands; command and they go forth to slay; command, and they return again. Only thou rulest alone with me, and the black folk, not the white, shall be thy servants."

"I hear thee, King. Now, as a first fruit, give to me Noie, daughter of Seyapi, my slave whom the soldiers stole away from Ramah beyond the river where I dwell."

"She is dead, White One, she is dead for her crimes," answered Dingaan looking at her.

Now Rachel's heart sank in her, for it might well be that a trick had been played on her, and that this was true. Or perhaps this tale of Noie's death was but a trap to test her powers, moreover it was not likely that the King, who had promised that she should live, would dare to break his word to one whom he believed or half believed to be a spirit.

For a moment she thought, then after her nature determined to be bold and hazard all upon a throw. Therefore she did not argue or reproach, but said:

"She is not dead. I have questioned every spear in Zululand, and none of them is red with her blood."

"Thou art right," he answered, "the spears are clean. She died in the river."

Now Rachel was sure, and answered in her clear voice:

"I have questioned the waters, and I have questioned the crocodiles, and they answer that Noie has passed them safely."

"Thou art right, White One. She died by a rope in yonder huts."

Now Rachel looked at the huts and cried:

"Noie, I hear thee, I see thee, I smell thee out. Come forth, Noie."

The King and his councillors stared at her, whispering to one another, and before ever they had done their whisperings out from among the gloom of the huts crept Noie.

To Rachel she crept, taking no heed even of the King, and crouching down in the faint shadow of her that the moonlight threw, she flung her arms about her knees and pressed her forehead on her feet. Now Rachel's heart bounded with joy at the sight of her, and she longed to bend down and kiss her, but did not, lest her great dignity should be lessened in the eyes of the King, only she said:

"I greet you, Noie, be seated in my shadow where you are safe, and tell me, have these men dealt well by you?"

"Not so ill, Inkosazana, that is since I reached the Great Kraal. But one of them, he who sits yonder," and she pointed to a certain induna, "struck me on the journey, and took away my food."

Now Rachel looked at the man angrily, playing with the little wand in her hand, whereon this induna shivered with terror, fearing lest she should point it at him. Rising he came to Rachel and flung himself down before her.

"What have you to say," asked Rachel, "you who have dared to strike my servant?"

"Inkosazana," he mumbled, "the maid was obstinate, and tried to run away, and our orders were to bring her to the King. Spare my life, I pray thee."

"King," said Rachel, "I have power over this man, have I not?"

"It is so," answered Dingaan. "Kill him if thou wilt."

Rachel seemed to consider while the poor wretch with chattering teeth implored her to forgive. Then she turned to Noie, saying:

"He struck you, not me. I give him to you to do by as you will. Shall he sleep to-night with the living or the dead?"

Noie looked at him, and next at a mark on her arm, and the induna, ceasing from his prayers to Rachel, clutched Noie by the ankle, and begged her mercy.

"Your life has been given to you," he said, "give mine to me, lest ill-fortune follow you."

"Do you remember," asked Noie contemptuously, "how when you had beaten me, yonder by the Tugela, you said you hoped that it would be your luck to put a spear through this heart of mine? And do you remember that I answered you that the spear would be over your own heart first, and that thereon you called me 'Daughter of Wizards' and struck me again—me, the child of Seyapi, upon whom the mantle of the Inkosazana lies, me who have drunk of her wisdom and of his, you struck *me*, you dog," and lifting her foot she spurned him in the face.

Now the King and his company, concluding that the thing was finished, glanced at Rachel to see her point with the rod and thus give the man to death. But Rachel waited, sure that Noie had not done. Moreover, whatever Noie might say, she had determined to save him.

Meanwhile, the girl, after a pause said:

"Were you a man you would be too proud to ask your life of me, but you are a dog, and, Dog, I remember that you have children, among them a daughter of my own age, whom I saw come out to greet you. For her sake, then, take your life, and with it this new name that I give you—'Soldier-who-strikes-girls.'"

So the man rose, and weak with shame and the agony of suspense, crept swiftly from the place, fearing lest the Inkosazana or her servant might change her mind and kill him after all. But Noie's name clung to him so closely that at length, unable to bear the ridicule of it, he and his family fled from Zululand.

So this matter ended.

Now the King spoke, saying:

"White One, thy magic is great, and thine eyes could pierce the darkness and see thy servant hidden, and call her forth to thee. Yet know, she is mine, not thine, for when she fled I had already chosen her to be my wife, and afterwards I sent and killed the wizard Seyapi, and all his House."

"But this girl thou didst not kill, O King, for I saved her."

"It is so, White One. I have heard lately how thou didst call down the lightning and burn up my soldier who followed after her, so that nothing of him remained."

"Yes," said Rachel quietly, "as, were it to please me, I could burn thee up also, O King," a saying at which Dingaan looked afraid.

"Yet," he went on, waving his hand as though to put aside this unpleasant suggestion, "the maid is mine, not thine, and therefore I took her."

"How didst thou learn that she dwelt at my kraal?" asked Rachel.

The King hesitated.

"The white man, Ishmael, he whom thou callest Ibubesi, told thee, did he not?"

Dingaan bowed his head.

"And he told thee that thou couldst make what promises thou wouldst to me as to the girl's life, but that afterwards when thou hadst called me here to claim it, thou mightest kill her or keep her as a wife, as it pleased thee."

"I can hide nought from thee; it is so," said Dingaan.

"Is that still in thy mind, O King?" asked Rachel again, beginning to play with the little wand.

"Not so, not so," he answered hurriedly. "Hadst thou not come the girl would have died, as she deserved to do according to our law. But thou hast come and claimed her, O Holder of the Spirit of Nomkubulwana, and she sits in thy shadow and is clothed with thy garment. Take her then, for henceforth she is holy, as thou art holy."

Rachel heard, and without any change of countenance waved her hand to show that this question was finished. Then she asked suddenly:

"What is this great matter whereof thou wouldst speak with me, O King?"

"Surely thy wisdom has told thee, White One," he answered uneasily.

"Perchance, yet I would have it from thy lips, and now."

Now Dingaan consulted a little with his council.

"White One," he said presently, "the thing is grave, and we need guidance. Therefore, as the circle of the witch-doctors have declared must be done, we ask it of thee who art named with the name of the Spirit of our people and hast of her wisdom. Thou knowest, White One, of the fights in past years between the white people of Natal and the Zulus, in which many were slain on either side. But now, when we are at peace with the English, we hear of another white people, the Amaboona" (*i.e.* the Dutch Boers), "who are marching towards us from the Cape, and have already fought with Moselikatze—the traitor who was once my captain—and killed thousands of his men. These Amaboona threaten us also, and say aloud that they will eat us up, for they are brave and armed with the white man's weapons that spit out lightning. Now, White One, what shall we do? Shall I send out my impis and fall on them while they are unprepared, and make an end of them, as seems

wisest, and is the wish of my indunas? Or, shall I sit at home and watch, trying to be at peace with them, and only strike back if they strike at me? Answer not lightly, O Zoola, for much may hang upon thy words. Remember also that he whose name may not be spoken, the Lion who ruled before me and is gone, with his last breath uttered a certain prophecy concerning the white people and this land."

"Let me hear that prophecy, O King."

"Come forth," said Dingaan pointing to a councillor who sat in the circle, "come forth, thou who knowest, and tell the tale in the ears of this White One."

A figure rose, a draped figure whose face was hidden in a hood of blanket. It came forward, and as it came it drew the blanket tighter about it. Rachel, watching all things, saw, or thought she saw, that one of its hands was white as though it had been burned with fire. Surely she had seen such a hand before.

"Speak," she said.

"Name me by my name and tell me who I am and I will obey thee," answered the man.

Then she was sure, for she remembered the voice. She looked at him indifferently and asked,

"By what name shall I name you, O Slayer of a king? Will you be called Mopo or Umbopa, who have borne them both?"

Now Dingaan stared, and the shrouded form before her started as though in surprise.

"Why do you seek to mock me?" she went on. "Can a blanket of bark hide that face of yours from these eyes of mine which saw it a while ago at Ramah, when you came thither to judge of me, O Mouth of the King?"

Now the man let the blanket slip from his head and looked at her.

"It seems that it cannot," he answered. "Then I told thee that I had dreamed of the Spirit of our people, and that thou, White One, wast like to her of

whom I had dreamed. Canst thou tell me what was the fashion of that dream of mine ? "

Now Rachel understood that notwithstanding his words at Ramah, this man still doubted her, and was set up to prove her, and all that Noie had told her about him and the secret history of the Zulus came back into her mind.

" Surely Mopo or Umbopa," she replied, " you dreamed three dreams, not one. Is it of the last you speak ?—that dream at the kraal Duguza, when the Inkosazana rode past you on a storm clothed in lightning, and shaking in her hand a spear of fire ? "

" Yes, I speak of it," he replied in an awed voice, " but if thou art but a woman as thou hast said, how knowest thou these things ? "

" Perchance I am both woman and spirit, and perchance the past tells them to me," Rachel answered ; " but the past has many voices, and now that I dwell in the flesh I cannot hear them all. Let me search you out. Let me read your heart," and she bent forward and fixed her eyes upon him, holding him with her eyes.

" Ah ! now I see and I hear," she said presently. " Had you not a sister, Mopo, a certain Baleka, who afterwards entered the house of the Black One and bore a son and died in the Tatiyana Cleft ? Shall I tell you how she died ? "

" Tell it not ! Tell it not ! " exclaimed the old man quaveringly.

" So be it. There is no need. Yet ere she died you made a promise to this Baleka, and that promise you kept at the kraal Duguza, you and the prince Umhlangana, and another prince whose name I forget," and she looked at Dingaan, who put his hand before his face. " You kept that promise with an assegai—let me look, let me look into your heart—yes, with a little assegai handled with the royal red wood, an assegai that had drunk much blood."

Now a low moan broke from the lips of Dingaan, and those who sat with them, while Umbopa shivered as though with cold.

"Have mercy, I pray thee," he gasped. "Forgive me if at times since we met at Ramah I thought thee but a white maiden, beautiful and bold, as thou didst declare thyself to be. Now I see thou hast the spirit, or else how didst thou know these things?"

Noie heard and smiled in the shadow, but Rachel stood silent.

"I was bidden to tell thee of the last words of the Black One," went on Umbopa hurriedly; "but what need is there to tell thee anything who knowest all? They were that he heard the sound of the running of the feet of a great white people which shall stamp out the children of the Zulus."

"Nay," answered Rachel, "I think they were, '*Wherefore wouldst thou kill me, Mopo?*'"

Again Dingaan moaned, for he had heard these very words spoken. Umbopa turned and stared at him, and he stared at Umbopa.

"Come hither," said Rachel, beckoning to the old man.

He obeyed, and she threw the corner of her cloak over his head and whispered into his ear. He listened to her whisperings, then with a cry broke from her and fled away out of the council of the King.

When he had gone there was silence, though Dingaan looked a question with his eyes.

"Ask it not," she said, "ask it not of me, or of him. I think this Mopo here had his secrets in the past. I think that once he sat in a hut at night and bargained with certain Great Ones, a prince who lives, and a prince who died. Come hither, come hither, thou son of Senzangacona, come from the fields of Death and tell me what was that bargain which thou madest with Mopo, thou and another?" and once again Rachel beckoned, this time upwards in the air.

Now the face of Dingaan went grey, even in the moonlight it went grey beneath the blackness of his skin, for there rose before his mind a vision of a hut and of Mopo and of Umhlangana, the prince his brother whom he had slain, and of himself, seated in the darkness, their heads together beneath a blanket whispering of the murder of a king.

"Thou knowest all," he gasped, "thou art Nomkubulwana and no other. Spare us, Spirit who canst summon our dead sins from the grave of time, and make them walk alive before us."

"Nay, nay," she answered mockingly, "surely I am but a woman, daughter of a Teacher who lives yonder over the Tugela, a white maiden who eats and sleeps and drinks as other maidens do. Take notice, King, and you his captains, that I am no spirit, nothing but a woman who chances to bear a high name, and to have some wisdom. Only," she added with meaning, "if any harm should come to me, if I should die, then I think that I should become a spirit, a terrible spirit, and that ill would it go with that people against whom my blood was laid."

"Oh!" said the King, who still shook with fear, "we know, we know. Mock us not, I pray. Thou art the Spirit who hast chosen to wear the robe of woman, as flame hides itself in flint, and woe be to the hand that strikes the fire from this stone. White One, give us now that wisdom whereof thou speakest. Shall I fall upon the Boers or shall I let them be?"

Rachel looked upwards, studying the stars.

"She takes counsel with the Heavens, she who is their daughter," muttered one of the indunas in a low voice.

As he spoke it chanced that a bright meteor travelling from the south-west swept across the sky to burst and vanish over the kraal of Umgugundhlovo.

"It is a messenger to her," said one. "I saw the fire shine upon her hair and vanish in her breast."

"Nay," answered another, "it is the *Ehlose*, the guardian ghost of the Amazulu that appears and dies."

"Not so," broke in a third, "that light shows the Amaboona travelling from the south-west to be eaten up in the blackness of our impis."

"Such a star runs ever before the death of kings. It fell the night ere the Black One died," murmured a fourth as though he spoke to himself.

Only Dingaan, taking no heed of them, said, addressing Rachel:

"Read thou the omen."

"Nay," she replied upon the swift impulse of the moment, "I read it not. Interpret it as ye will. Here is my answer to thy question, King. *Those who lift the spear shall perish by the spear.*"

At this saying the captains murmured a little, for they, who desired war, understood that she counselled peace between them and the Boers, though others thought that she meant that the Boers would perish. Dingaan also looked downcast. Watching their faces, Rachel was sure that not even her hand could hold them back from their desire. That war must come. Again she spoke:

"The star travels whither it is thrown by the hand of the Umkulunkulu, the Master of men; the spear finds the heart to which it is appointed. Read you the omen as you will. I have spoken, but ye will not understand. That which shall be, shall be."

She bent her head, and turned her ear towards the ground as though to hearken.

"What was that tale of the last words of the Great Lion who is gone?" she went on. "Ask it of Mopo, ask it of Dingaan the King. It seems to me that I also hear the feet of a people travelling over plain and mountain, and the rivers behind them run red with blood. Are they black feet or white feet?

Read ye the omen as ye will. I have spoken for the first time and the last; trouble me no more with this matter of the white men and your war," and turning, Rachel glided from the court, followed by Noie with bowed head.

CHAPTER XI

ISHMAEL VISITS THE INKOSAZANA

When at last they were in the hut and the door-board had been safely closed, Rachel took Noie in her arms and kissed her. But Noie did not kiss her back, she only pressed her hand against her forehead.

"Why do you not kiss me, Noie?" asked Rachel.

"How can I kiss you, Inkosazana," replied the girl humbly, "I who am but the dog at your feet, the dog whom twice it has pleased you to save from death."

"Inkosazana!" exclaimed Rachel, "I weary of that name. I am but a woman like yourself, and I hate this part which I must play."

"Yet it is a high part and you play it very well. While I listened to you to-night, Zoola, twice and thrice I wondered if you are not something more than you deem yourself to be. That beautiful body of yours is but a cup like those of other women, but say, who fills the cup with the wine of wisdom? Why do kings and councillors fear you, and why do you fear nothing? Why did dead Seyapi talk to me of you in dreams? What strange chance gave you that name of yours and made you holy in these men's eyes? What power teaches you the truth and gives you wit and strength to speak it? Why are you different from the rest of maidens, white or black?"

"I do not know, Noie. Something tells me what to do and say. Also I understand these Zulus, and you have taught me much. You told me all the

hidden tale of yonder Mopo a year gone by, or more, as you have told me many of the darkest secrets of this people that you had from your father who knew them all. At the pinch I remembered it, no more, and played upon them by my knowledge."

"What was it you said to Mopo under your cloak, Lady?"

Rachel smiled as she answered:

"I only asked him if it were not in his mind, having killed one king, to kill another also, and that spear went home."

"Ah!" exclaimed Noie in admiration, "at least I never told you that."

"No, I read it in his eyes; for a moment all his heart was open to me, yes, and the heart of Dingaan also. He fears Mopo, and Mopo hates him, and one day hate and fear will come together."

"Ah!" said Noie again, "you know much."

"Yes," answered Rachel with sudden passion, "more than I wish to know. Noie, you are right, I am not altogether as others are, there is a power in my blood. I see and hear what should not be seen and heard; at times fears fill me, or joys lift me up, and I think that I draw near to another world than ours. No, it is folly. I am over-wrought. Who would not be that must endure so much and be set upon this throne, a goddess among barbarians with life and death upon my lips? Oh! when the King asked me his riddle I knew not what to answer, who feared lest ten thousand lives might pay the price of a girl's incautious words. Then that meteor broke; there have been several this night, but none noted them till I looked upwards, and you know the rest. Let them guess its meaning, which they cannot, for it has none."

"Why did you not speak more plainly, Zoola?"

"Oh! because I dared not. Who am I to meddle with such matters, who came here but to save you?

I warned them not to make war upon the Boers; what more could I do? Moreover, it is useless, for fight they must and will and pay the price. Of that I am sure. I feel it here," and she pressed her hand upon her heart. "Yes, and other nearer things! Oh! Noie, I would that I were back at home. Say, can we start to-morrow at the dawn?"

Noie shook her head.

"I do not think that they will let you go; they will keep you to be their great doctoress. You should not have come. I sent you word—what did my life matter?"

"Keep me," answered Rachel, stamping her foot. "They dare not; here at least I am the Inkosazana, and I will be obeyed."

Noie made no answer, only she said:

"Ishmael is here. I have seen him. He wished to have me killed at once because he is afraid of me. But when he was sure that you were coming, Dingaan would not break his word which he had sent to you."

Rachel's face fell.

"Ishmael!" she exclaimed in dismay, then recovered herself and added: "Well, I am not afraid of Ishmael, for here his life is in my hand. Oh! I am worn out, I cannot talk of the man to-night. I must sleep, Noie, I must sleep. Come, lie at my side and let us sleep."

"Nay," answered the girl, "my place is at the door. But drink this milk and lay you down without fear, for I will watch."

Rachel obeyed, and Noie sat by her holding her hand till presently her eyes shut and she slept. But Noie did not sleep. All that night she sat there watching and listening, till at length the dawn came and she lay down also by the door and rested.

The sun was high in the heavens when Rachel woke.

"Good morrow to you, Zoola," said the sweet

voice of Noie. "You have slept well. Now you must rise, bathe yourself and eat, for already messengers from the King have been to the outer gate, saying that they wait to escort you to a better house that has been made ready for you."

"I hoped that they waited to escort me out of Zululand," answered Rachel.

"I asked them of that, Zoola, but they declared it must not be, as the council of the doctors had been summoned to consider your sayings, and two days will pass before it can meet. Also they declare that your horse is sick and not fit to travel, meaning that they will not let you go."

"But I have the right to go, Noie."

"The bird has the right to fly, but what if it is in a cage, Zoola?"

"I am queen here, Noie; the bars will burst at my word."

"It may be so, Zoola, but what if the bird should find that it has no nest to fly to?"

"What do you mean?" asked Rachel paling.

"Only that it seems best that you should not anger these Zulus, Lady, lest it should come into their minds to destroy your nest, thinking that so you might come to love this cage. No, no, I have heard nothing, but I guess their thoughts. You need rest; bide here where you are safe a day or two, and let us see what happens."

"Speak plainly, Noie. I do not understand your parable of birds and cages."

"Zoola, I obey. I think that if you say you will go, none, not the King himself, would dare to stay you, though you would have to go on foot, for then that horse would die. But an impi would go with you, or before you, and woe betide those who held you from returning to Zululand! Do you understand me now?"

"Yes," answered Rachel. "You mean!—oh! I cannot speak it. I will remain here a few days."

So she rose and bathed herself and was dressed by Noie, and ate of the food that had been brought to the door of the hut. Then she went out, and in the little courtyard found a litter waiting that was hung round with grass mats.

"The King's word is that you should enter the litter," said Noie.

She did so, whereon Noie clapped her hands and girls in bead dresses ran in, and having prostrated themselves before the litter, lifted it up and carried it away, Noie walking at its side.

Rachel, peeping between the mats, saw that she was borne out of the town, surrounded, but at a distance, by a guard of hundreds of armed men. Presently they began to ascend a hill, whereon grew many trees, and after climbing it for a while, reached a large kraal with huts between the outer and inner fence, and in its centre a great space of park-like land through which ran a stream.

Here, by the banks of the stream, stood a large new hut, and behind at a little distance two or three other huts. In front of this great hut the litter was set down by the bearers, who at once went away. Then at Noie's bidding Rachel came out of it and looked at the place which had been given her in which to dwell.

It was a beautiful spot, away from the dust and the noises of the Great Kraal, and so placed upon a shoulder of the hillside that the soldiers who guarded this House of the Inkosazana, as it was called, could not be seen or heard. Yet Rachel looked at it with distaste, feeling that it was that cage of which Noie had spoken.

A cage it proved indeed, a solitary cage, for here Rachel abode in regal seclusion and in state that could only be called awful. No man might approach her house unbidden, and the maidens who waited upon her did so with downcast eyes, never speaking, and falling on to

their knees if addressed. On the first day of her imprisonment, for it was nothing less, an unhappy Zulu, through ignorance or folly, slipped through the outer guard and came near to the inner fence. Rachel, who was seated above, heard some shouts of rage and horror, and saw soldiers running towards him, and in another minute a body being carried away upon a shield. He had died for his sacrilege.

Once a day ambassadors came to her from the King to ask of her health, and if she had orders to give, but now even these men were not allowed to look upon her. They were led in by the women, each of them with a piece of bark cloth over his head, and from beneath this cloth they addressed her as though she were in truth divine. On the first day she bade them tell the King that her mission being ended, it was her desire to depart to her own home beyond the river. They heard her words in silence, then asked if she had anything to add. She replied—yes, it was her will that they should cease to wear veils in her presence, also that no more men should be killed upon her account as had happened that morning. They said that they would convey the order at once, as several were under sentence of death who had argued as to whether she were really the Inkosazana. So she sent them away instantly, fearing lest they should be too late, and they were led off backwards bowing and giving the royal salute. Afterwards she rejoiced to hear that her commands had arrived just in time, and that the blood of these poor people was not upon her head.

Next day the messengers returned at the same hour, unveiled as she desired, bearing the answer of the King and his council. It was to the effect that the Inkosazana had no need to ask permission to come or to go. Her Spirit, they knew, was mighty and could wander where it willed; all the impis of the Zulus could not hold her Spirit. But—and here came

the sting of this clever answer—it was necessary, until her sayings had been considered, that the body in which that Spirit abode should remain with them a while. Therefore the King and his counsellors and the whole nation of the Zulus prayed her to be satisfied with the sending of her Spirit across the Tugela, leaving her body to dwell a space in the House of the Inkosazana.

Rachel looked at them in despair, for what was she to reply to such reasoning as this? Before she could make up her mind, their spokesman said that a white man, Ibubesi, who said that he had often spoken with her, asked leave to visit her in her house.

Now Rachel thought a while. Ishmael was the last person in the whole world whom she wished to see. After the interview when they parted, and all that had happened since, it could not be otherwise. She remembered the threats he had uttered then, and to her father afterwards, the brutal and revolting threats. Some of these had been directed against Noie, and subsequently Noie was kidnapped by the Zulus. That those directed at herself had not been fulfilled was, she felt sure, due to a lack of opportunity alone.

Little wonder, then, that she feared and hated the man. Still he was of white blood, and perhaps for this reason had authority among the Zulus, who, as she knew, often consulted him. Moreover, notwithstanding his vapourings, like the Zulus whose superstitions he had contracted, he looked upon herself with something akin to fear. If she saw him she had no cause to dread anything that he could do to her, at any rate in this country where she was supreme, whereas on the other hand she might obtain information from him which would be very useful, or make use of him to enable her to escape from Zululand. On the whole, then, it seemed wisest to grant him an interview, especially as she gathered from the fact that the question was raised by Dingaan's indunas,

that for some reason of his own, the King hoped that she would do so.

Still she hesitated, loathing and despising him as she did.

"You have heard," she said in English to Noie, who stood behind her. "Now what shall I say?"

"Say—come," answered Noie in the same tongue. "Read his black heart and find out truth; he no can keep it from you. Say—come with soldiers. If he behave bad, tell them kill him. They obey you. No mind me. I not afraid of that wild beast now."

Then Rachel said to the indunas:

"I hear the King's word, and understand that he wishes me to receive this Ibubesi. Yet I know that man, as I know all men, white and black. He is an evil man, and it is not my pleasure to speak with him alone. Let him come with a guard of six captains, and let the captains be armed with spears, so that if I give the word, there may be an end of this Ibubesi."

Then the messengers saluted and departed as before.

On the morrow at about the same hour a praiser, or herald, arrived outside the inner fence of the kraal, and after he had shouted out Rachel's titles, attributes, beauties and supernatural powers for at least ten minutes, never repeating himself, announced that the indunas of the King were without accompanied by the white man, Ibubesi, awaiting her permission to enter. She gave it through Noie, and, the horn wand in her hand, seated herself upon a carved stool in front of the great hut. Presently an altercation arose upon the further side of the reed fence in which she recognised Ishmael's strident voice, mingled with the deeper tones of the Zulus, who seemed to be insisting upon something.

"They command him to take off his headdress," said Noie, "and threaten to beat him if he will not."

"Go, tell them to admit him as he is, that I may

see his face, and learn if he be the white man whom I knew, or another," answered Rachel, and she went.

Then the gate was opened and the messengers were led in by women. After these came six captains, carrying broad spears, as she had commanded, and last of all Ishmael himself. Rachel's whole nature shrank at the sight of his dark, handsome features. She loathed the man now as always; her instinct warned her of danger at his hands. Also she remembered his threats when last they met and she rejected him, and what had passed between him and her father on the following day. But of all this she showed nothing, remaining seated in silence with calm, set face.

Ishmael was advancing with a somewhat defiant air. Except for a kaross upon his shoulders he wore European dress, and the ridiculous hat with the white ostrich feather in it, both of them now much the worse for wear, which she remembered so well. Also he had a lighted pipe in his mouth. Presently one of the captains appeared to become suddenly aware of this pipe, for stretching out his hand, he snatched it away, and the hat with it, throwing them upon the ground. Ishmael, whose teeth and lips were hurt, turned on the man with an oath and struck him, whereon instantly he was seized, and would perhaps have been killed before Rachel could interfere, had it not been unlawful to shed blood in her presence. As it was, with a motion of her wand, she signified that he was to be loosed, a command that Noie interpreted to them. At any rate they let him go, though a captain placed his feet on the hat and pipe. Then Ishmael came forward and said awkwardly:

"How do you do? I did not expect to see you here," and he devoured her beauty with his bold, greedy eyes, though not without doubt and dread, or so thought Rachel.

Taking no notice of his greeting, she said in a cold voice:

"I have sent for you here to ask if you have any reason as to why I should not order you to be killed for your crime against my servant, Noie, and therefore against me?"

Now Ishmael paled, for he had not expected such a welcome, and began to deny the thing.

"Spare your falsehoods," went on Rachel. "I have it from the King's lips, and from my own knowledge. Remember only that here I am the Inkosazana with power of life and death. If I speak the word, or point at you with this wand, in a minute you will have gone to your account."

"Inkosazana or not," he answered in a cowed voice, "you know too much. Well, then, she was taken that you might follow her to Zululand to ask her life, and you see that the plan was good, for you came, and," he added, recovering some of his insolence and familiarity: "we are here together, two white people among all these silly niggers."

Rachel looked him up and down; then she looked at the indunas seated in silence before her, at the great-limbed captains with their broad spears beyond, reminding her in their plumes and attitudes of some picture that she had seen of Roman gladiators about to die. Lastly she looked at the delicately-shaped Noie by her side, with her sweet, inscrutable face, the woman whose parents and kin this outcast had brought to a bloody death, the woman whom to forward his base ends he had vilely striven to murder. Slowly she looked at them all and at him, and said:

"Shall I explain to these nobles and captains what you call them, and what you are called among your own people? Shall I tell them something of your story, Mr. Ishmael?"

"You can do what you like," he answered sullenly. "You know why I got you here—because I love you; I told you that many months ago. While you were down at Ramah I had no chance with you, because of

that old hypocrite of a father of yours, and this black girl," and he looked at Noie viciously. "Here I thought that it would be different—that you would be glad of my company, but you have turned yourself into a kind of goddess and hold me off," and he paused.

"Go on," said Rachel.

"All right, I will. You may think yourself a goddess, as I do myself sometimes. But I know that you are a woman too, and that soon you will get tired of this business. You want to go home to your father and mother, don't you? Well, you can't. You are a prisoner here, for these fools have got it into their heads that you are their Spirit, and that it would be unlucky to let you out of the country. So here you must stop, for years, perhaps, or till they are sick of you and kill you. Just understand, Rachel, that nobody can help you to escape except me, and that I shan't do so for nothing."

Rachel straightened herself upon her seat, gripping the edge of it with her hands, for her temper was rising, while Noie bent forward and said something in her ear.

"What is that black devil whispering to you?" he asked. "Telling you to have me killed, I expect. Well, you daren't, for what would your holy parents say? It would be murder, wouldn't it, and you would go to hell, where I daresay you come from, for otherwise how could you be such a witch? Look here," he went on, changing his tone, "don't let's squabble. Make it up with me. I'll get you clear of this and marry you afterwards on the square. If you won't, it will be the worse for you—and everybody else. yes, everybody else."

"Mr. Ishmael," answered Rachel calmly, "you are making a very great mistake, about my scruples as to taking life I mean, amongst other things. Once when it was necessary you saw me kill a man. Well, if I am forced to it, what I did then I will do again,

only not with my own hand. Mr. Ishmael, you said just now that you could get me out of Zululand. I take you at your word, not for my own sake, for I am comfortable enough here, but for that of my father and mother who will be anxious," and her voice weakened a little as she spoke of them.

"Do you? Well, I won't. I am comfortable here also, and shall be more so as the husband of the Inkosazana. This is a very pretty kraal, and it is quite big enough for two," he added with an amorous sneer.

Now for a minute at least Rachel sat still and rigid. When she spoke again it was in a kind of gasp:

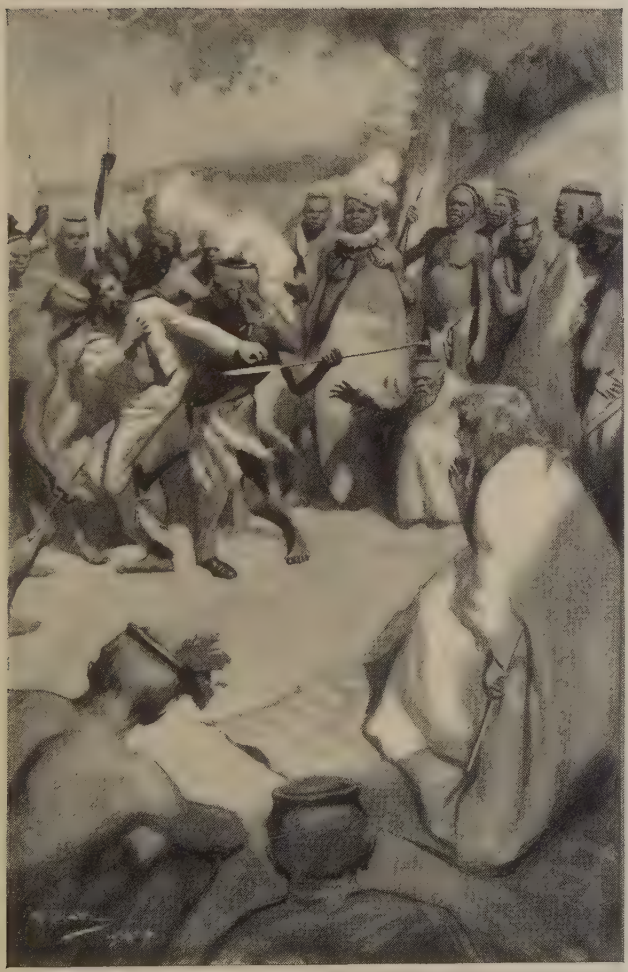
"Never," she said, "have you gone nearer to your death, you wanderer without name or shame. Listen now. I give you one week to arrange my escape home. If it is not done within that time, I will pay you back for those words. Be silent, I will hear no more."

Then she called out:

"Rise, men, and bear the message of the Inkosazana to Dingaan, King of the Zulus. Say to Dingaan that this wandering white dog whom he has sent into my house has done me insult. Say that he has asked me, the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, to be one of his wives."

At these words the counsellors and captains uttered a shout of rage, and two of the latter seized Ishmael by the arm, lifting their spears to plunge them into him. Rachel waved her wand and they let them fall again.

"Not yet," she said. "Take him to the King, and if my word comes to the King, then he dies, and not till then. I would not have his vile blood on my hands. Unless I speak, I, Queen of the Heavens, leave him to the vengeance of the Heavens. My mantle is over him, lead him back to the King and let me see his face no more."



"The captains . . . seized Ishmael by the arm"
(*see page 150*).

"We hear and it shall be so," they answered with one voice, then forgetting their ceremony hustled Ishmael from the kraal.

"Have I done well?" asked Rachel of Noie, when they were alone.

"No, Zoola," she answered, "you should have killed the snake while you were hot against him, since when your blood grows cold you can never do it, and he will live to bite you."

"I have no right to kill a man, Noie, just because he makes love to me, and I hate him. Also, if I did so he could not help me to escape from Zululand, which he will do now because he is afraid of me."

"Will he be afraid of you when you are both across the Tugela?" asked Noie. "Inkosazana, give me power and ask no questions. Ibubesi killed my father and mother and brethren, and has tried to kill me. Therefore my heart would not be sore if, after the fashion of this land, I paid him spears for battle-axes, for he deserves to die."

"Perhaps, Noie, but not by my word."

"Perhaps by your hand, then," said Noie, looking at her curiously. "Well, soon or late he will die a red death—the reddest of deaths, I learned that from the spirit of my father."

"The spirit of your father?" said Rachel, looking at her.

"Certainly, it speaks to me often and tells me many things, though I may not repeat them to you till they are accomplished. Thus I was not afraid in the hands of Dingaan, for it told me that you would save me."

"I wish it would speak to me and tell me when I can go home," said Rachel with a sigh.

"It would if it could, Zoola, but it cannot because the curtain is too thick. Had all you loved been slain before your eyes, then the veil would be worn thin as mine is, and through it, you who are akin

to them, would hear the talk of the ghosts, and dimly see them wandering beneath their trees."

"Beneath their trees——!"

"Yes, the trees of their life, of which all the boughs are deeds and all the leaves are words, under the shadow of which they must abide for ever. My people could tell you of those trees, and perhaps they will one day when we visit them together. Nay, pay no heed, I was wandering in my talk. It is the sight of that wild beast, Ibubesi. You will not let me kill him! Well, doubtless it is fated so. I think one day you will be sorry—but too late."

CHAPTER XII

RACHEL SEES A VISION

THAT evening Ishmael was brought before the King. He was in evil case, for the captains, some of whom had grudges against him, when he tried to break away from them outside the gate, had beaten him with their spear shafts nearly all the way from the kraal to the Great Place, remarking when he fought and remonstrated, that the Inkosazana had forbidden them to kill him, but had said nothing as to giving him the flogging which he deserved. His clothes were torn, his hat and pipe were lost—indeed hours before Noie had thrown both of them into the fire—his eyes were black from the blow of a heavy stick and he was bruised all over.

Such was his appearance when he was thrust before Dingaan, seething with rage which he could scarcely suppress, even in that presence.

"Did you visit the Inkosazana to-day, White Man?" asked the King blandly, while the indunas stared at him with grim amusement.

Then Ishmael broke out into a recital of his wrongs, demanding that the captains who had beaten him, a white man, and a great person, should be killed.

"Silence," said Dingaan at length. "The question, Night-prowler, is whether you should not be killed, you dog who dared to insult the Inkosazana by offering yourself to her as a husband. Had she commanded you to be speared, she would have done well, and if you trouble me with your shoutings, I

will send you to sleep with the jackals to-night without waiting for her word."

Now, seeing his danger, Ishmael was silent, and the King went on:

"Did you discover, as I bade you, why it is that the Inkosazana desires to leave us?"

"Yes, King. It is because she would return to her own people, the old prayer-doctor and his wife."

"They are not her people!" exclaimed Dingaan. "We know that she came to them out of the storm, and that they are but the foster-parents chosen for her by the Heavens. You were the first to tell us that story, and how she caused the lightning to burn up my soldier yonder at Ramah. We are her people and no others. Can the Inkosazana have a father and a mother?"

"I don't know," answered Ishmael, "but she is a woman and I never knew a woman who was without them. At least I am sure that she looks upon them as her father and mother, obeying them in all things, and that she will never leave them while they live, unless they command her to do so."

Dingaan stared at him with his pig-like eyes, repeating after him—"while they live, unless they command her to do so." Then he asked:

"If the Inkosazana desires to go, who is there that dares to stay her, and if she puts out her magic, who is there that has the power? If a hand is lifted against her, will she not lay a curse on us and bring destruction upon us?"

"I don't know," answered Ishmael again, "but if she goes back among the white folk and is angry, I think that she will bring the Boers upon you."

Now Dingaan's face grew very troubled, and bidding Ishmael stand back a while, he consulted with his council. Then he said:

"Listen to me, White Man. It would be a very evil thing if the Inkosazana were to leave us, for with

her would go the Spirit of our people, and their good luck, so say the witch-doctors with one voice, and I believe them. Further, it is our desire that she should remain with us a while. This day the Council of the Diviners has spoken, saying that the words of the Inkosazana which she uttered here are too hard for them, and that other doctors of a people who live far away, must be sent for and brought face to face with her. Therefore here at Umgugundhlovo she should abide until they come."

"Indeed," answered Ishmael indifferently.

In the doctors who dwelt far away, and the Council of the Diviners he had no belief. But understanding the natives as he did he guessed correctly enough that the latter found themselves in a cleft stick. Worked on by their superstitions, which he had first awakened for his own ends, they had accepted Rachel as something more than human, as the incarnation of the Spirit of their people. This Mopo, who was said to have killed Chaka by command of that Spirit, had acknowledged her to be, and therefore they did not dare to declare that her words spoken as an oracle were empty words. But neither did they dare to interpret the saying that she meant that no attack must be made upon the Boers and should be obeyed. To do this would be to fly in the face of the martial aspirations of the nation and the secret wishes of the King, and perhaps if war ultimately broke out, would cost them their lives. So it came about that they announced that they could not understand her sayings, and had decided to thrust off the responsibility on to the shoulders of some other diviners, though who these men might be Ishmael neither knew nor took the trouble to ask.

"But," went on the King, "who can force the dove to build in a tree that does not please it, seeing that it has wings and can fly away? Yet if its own tree, that in which it was reared from the nest, could be brought to

it, it might be pleased to abide there. Do you understand, White Man ? "

" No," answered Ishmael, though in fact he understood well enough that the King was playing upon Rachel's English name of Dove, and that he meant that her home might be moved into Zululand. " No, the Inkosazana is not a bird, and who can carry trees about ? "

" Have the spear-shafts knocked the wit out of you, Ibubesi," asked Dingaan, impatiently, " or are you drunk with beer ? Learn then my meaning. The Inkosazana will not stay because her home is yonder, therefore it must be brought here and she will stay. At first I gave orders that if this old white teacher and his wife tried to accompany her, they should be killed. Now I eat up those words. They must come to Zululand."

" How will you persuade them to be such fools ? " asked Ishmael.

" How did I persuade the Inkosazana herself to come ? Was it not to seek one whom she loved ? "

" They will think that you have killed her, and wish to kill them also."

" No, because you will go in command of an impi and show them otherwise."

" I cannot go ; your brutes of captains have hurt my head, and lamed me ; I cannot walk or ride."

" Then you can be carried in a litter, or," he added threateningly, " you can abide here with the vultures. The Inkosazana is merciful, but why should I not avenge her wrongs upon you, white dog, who have dared to scratch at the kraal gate of the Inkosazana-y-Zoola ? "

Now Ishmael saw that he had no choice ; also a dark thought rose dimly in his mind. He desired to win Rachel above everything on earth, he was mad with love—or what he understood as love—of her, and this business might be worked to his advantage.

Moreover, to stay was death. So he fell to bargaining for a reward for his services, a large reward in cattle and ivory; half of it to be paid down at once, and it was promised to him. Then he took his instructions. These were that he was to travel to the mission station of Ramah in command of a small impi of three hundred men, whose only orders would be that they were to obey him in all things! That he was to tell the Umfundusi who was called Shouter, that if they wished to see her any more, he and his wife must come to dwell with the Inkosazana, in Zululand: that if they refused he was to bring them by force. If, perchance, the Inkosazana, choosing to exercise her authority, crossed the Tugela and reached Ramah before he could do this, he was still to bring them, for then she would follow. In the same way, if the Shouter and his wife met her on the road, they were to travel on, for then she would turn and accompany them. He was to go at once and execute these orders.

"I hear," said Ishmael, "and will start as soon as the cattle have been delivered and sent on with the ivory to my kraal, Mafooti."

There was something in the man's voice, or in the look of low cunning which spread itself over his face, that attracted Dingaan's attention.

"The cattle and the ivory shall be sent," he said, sternly, "but ill shall it be for you, Ibubesi, if you seek to trick me in this matter. You have grown rich on my bounty, and yonder at your place, Mafooti, you have many cows, many wives, many children—my spies have given me count of all of them. Now, if you play me false, or if you dare to lift a finger against the White One, know that I will burn that kraal and slay the inhabitants with the spear and take the cattle, and when I catch you, Ibubesi, I will kill you, slowly, slowly. I have spoken, go."

"I go, Great Elephant, Calf of the Black Cow, and I will obey in all things," answered Ishmael in a

humble voice, for he was frightened. "The white people shall be brought, only I trust to you to protect me from the anger of the Inkosazana for all that I may do."

"You must make your own peace with the Inkosazana," answered Dingaan, and turning, he crept into his hut.

An hour later the great induna, Tamboosa, appeared at Rachel's kraal, and craved leave to speak with her.

"What is it?" asked Rachel when he had been admitted. "Have you come to lead me out of Zululand, Tamboosa?"

"Nay, White One," he answered, "the land needs you yet awhile. I have come to tell you that Dingaan would speak with your servant Noie, if it be your good pleasure to let her visit him. Fear not. No harm shall come to her, if it does you may order me to be put to death. You, yourself, could not be safer than she shall be."

"Are you afraid to go?" asked Rachel of Noie.

"Not I," answered the girl, with a laugh. "I trust to the King's word and to your might."

"Depart then," said Rachel, "and come back as swiftly as you may. Tamboosa shall lead you."

So Noie went.

Two hours after sundown, while Rachel was eating her evening meal in her Great Hut, attended by the maidens, the door-board was drawn aside, and Noie entered, saluted, and sat down. Rachel signed to the women to clear away the food and depart. When they had gone she asked what the King's business was, eagerly enough, for she hoped that it had to do with her leaving Zululand.

"It is a long story, Zoola," answered Noie, "but here is the heart of it. I told you when first we met that I am not of this people, although my mother was a Zulu. I told you that I am of the Dream-people, the

Ghost-people, the little Grey-people, who live away to the north beneath their trees, and worship their trees."

"Yes," answered Rachel, "and that is why you care nothing for men as other women do, but dream dreams and talk with spirits. But what of it?"

"That is why I dream dreams and talk with spirits, as one day I hope that I shall teach you to do, you whose soul is sister to my soul," replied Noie, her large eyes shining strangely in her delicate face. "And this of it—the Ghost-people are diviners, they can read the future and see the hearts of men; there are no diviners like them. Therefore chiefs and peoples who dwell far away send to them with great gifts, and pray them come read their fate, but they will seldom listen or obey. Now Dingaan and his councillors are troubled about this matter of the Boers, and the meaning of the words you spoke as to their waging war on them, and of the omen of the falling star. The council of the doctors can interpret none of these things, nor dare they ask you to do so, since you bade them speak no more to you of that matter, and they know that if they did, either you would not answer, or, worse still, say words that would displease them."

"They are right there," said Rachel. "To have to play the dark oracle once is enough for me. If I speak again, it shall be plainly."

"Therefore they have bethought them of the Dealers in Dreams and desire to bring you face to face with their prophets, the Ghost-Kings, that these may see your greatness and tell them the meaning of your words, and of the omen that you caused to travel through the skies."

"Do you mean that they wish me to visit these Ghost-Kings, Noie?"

"Not so, Zoola, for then they must part with your presence. They wish that the priests of the Ghost-

Kings should visit you, bearing with them the word of the Mother of the Trees."

"Visit me! How can they? Who will bring them here?"

"They wish that I should bring them, for as they know, I am of their blood, and I alone can talk their language, which my father taught me from a child."

"But, Noie, that would mean that we must be separated," said Rachel, in alarm.

"Yes, it would mean that, still I think it best that you should humour them and let me go, for otherwise I do not know how you will ever escape from Zululand. Now I told the King that I thought you would permit it on one condition only—that after you had been brought face to face with the priests of the Ghost-Kings, and they had interpreted your riddle, you should be escorted whence you came, and he answered that it should be so, and that meanwhile you could abide here in honour, peace and safety. Moreover, he promised that a messenger should be sent to Ramah to explain the reason of your delay."

"But how long will you be on the journey, Noie, and what if these prophets of yours refuse to visit Dingaan?"

"I cannot tell you who have never travelled that road. But I will march fast, and if I tire, swift runners shall bear me in a litter. To those who have the secret of its gate that country is not so very far away. Also, the Old Mother of the Trees is my father's aunt, and I think that the prophets will come at my prayer, or at the least send the answer to the question. Indeed, I am sure of it—ask me not why."

Still for a long while Rachel reasoned against this separation, which she dreaded, while Noie reasoned for it. She pointed out that here at least none could harm her, as they had seen in the treatment meted out to Ishmael, a white man whom the Zulus looked upon as their friend. Also she said with conviction

that these mysterious Ghost-Kings were very powerful, and could free her from the clutches of the Zulus, and protect her from them afterwards, as they would do when they came to know her case.

The end of it was that Rachel gave way, not because Noie's arguments convinced her, but because she was sure that she had other reasons which she did not choose to advance.

From that day when each of them tossed up a hair from her head at Ramah, notwithstanding the difference of their race and circumstances, these two had been as sisters. Rachel believed in Noie more, perhaps, than in any other living being, and thus also did Noie believe in Rachel. They knew that their destinies were intertwined, and were sure that not rivers or mountains or the will and violence of men, could keep them separate.

"I see," said Rachel, at length, "that you believe that my fate hangs upon this embassy of yours."

"I do believe it," answered Noie, confidently.

"Then go, but come back as swiftly as you may, for, my sister, I know not how without you I shall live on in this lonely greatness," and she took her in her arms and kissed her lips.

Afterwards, as they were laying themselves down to sleep, Rachel asked her if she had heard anything about Ishmael. She answered that she learned at the Great Kraal that he had been brought before the King that afternoon, and then taken back to his hut, where he was under guard. One of her escort told her, too, that since he saw the King, Ibubesi had fallen very sick, it was thought from a blow that he had received at the house of Inkosazana, and that now he was out of his mind and being attended by the doctors. "I wish," added Noie viciously, "that he were out of his body also, for then much sorrow would be spared. But that cannot be before the time."

On the next day before noon, Noie departed upon

her journey. Rachel sent for the captains of her escort and the Isanusis, or doctors, who were to accompany her, and in a few stern words gave her into their charge, saying that they should answer for her safety with their lives, to which they replied that they knew it, and would do so. If any harm came to the daughter of Seyapi through their fault, they were prepared to die. Then she talked for a long while with Noie, telling her all she knew of the Boers and the purpose of their wanderings, that she might be able to repeat it to her people, and show them how dreadful would be a war between this white folk and the Zulus.

Noie answered that she would give her message, but that it was needless, since the Ghost-Kings could see all that passed "in the bowls of water beneath their trees, and doubtless knew already of her coming and of the cause of it," a reply of which Rachel had not time to inquire the meaning. After this they embraced and parted, not without some tears.

When the gate shut behind Noie, Rachel walked to the high ground at the back of her hut, whence she could see over the fence of the kraal, and watched her departure. She had an escort of a hundred picked soldiers, with whom went fifty or sixty strong bearers, who carried food, karosses, and a litter. Also there were three doctors of magic and medicine, and two women, widows of high rank who were to attend upon her. At the head of this procession, save for two guides, walked Noie herself, with sandals on her feet, a white robe about her shoulders, and in her hand a little bough on which grew shining leaves, whereof Rachel did not know the meaning. She watched them until they passed over the brow of the hill, on the crest of which Noie turned and waved the bough towards her. Then Rachel went back to her hut, and sat there alone and wept.

This was the beginning of many dreadful days, most of which she passed wandering about within the circuit

of the kraal fence, a space of some three or four acres, or seated under the shadow of certain beautiful trees, which overhung a deep, clear pool of the stream that ran through the kraal, a reed-fringed pool whereon floated blooming lilies. That quiet water, the happy birds that nested in the trees and the flowering lilies seemed to be her only friends. Of the last, indeed, she would count the buds, watching them open in the morning and close again for their sleep at night, until a day came when their loveliness turned to decay, and others appeared in their place.

On the morrow of Noie's departure, Tamboosa and other indunas visited her, and asked her if she would not descend to the kraal of the King, and help him and his council to try cases, since while she was in the land she was its first judge. She answered, "No, that place smelt too much of blood." If they had cases for her to try, let them be brought before her in her own house. This she said idly, thinking no more of it, but next day was astonished to learn that the plaintiff and defendant in a great suit, with their respective advocates, and from thirty to forty witnesses, were waiting without to know when it was her pleasure to attend to their business.

With characteristic courage Rachel answered, "Now." Her knowledge of law was, it is true, limited to what, for lack of anything more exciting, she had read in some handbooks belonging to her father, who had been a justice of the peace in the Cape Colony, and to a few cases which she had seen tried in a rough-and-ready fashion at Durban, to which must be added an intimate acquaintance with Kaffir customs. Still, being possessed with a sincere desire to discover the truth and execute justice, she did very well. The matter in dispute was a large one, that of the ownership of a great herd of cattle which was claimed as an inheritance by each of the parties. Rachel soon discovered that both these men were

very powerful chiefs, and that the reason of their cause being remitted to her was that the King knew that if he decided in favour of either of them he would mortally offend the other.

For a long while Rachel, seated on her stool, listened silently to the impassioned pleadings of the plaintiff's lawyers. Presently this plaintiff was called as a witness, and in the course of his evidence said something which convinced her that he was lying. Then breaking her silence for the first time, she asked him how he dared to give false witness before the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, to whom the truth was always open, and who was acquainted with every circumstance connected with the cattle in dispute. The man, seeing her eyes fixed upon him, and being convinced of her supernatural powers, grew afraid, broke down, and publicly confessed his attempted fraud, into which he said he had been led by envy of his cousin, the defendant's, riches.

Rachel gave judgment accordingly, commanding that he should pay the costs in cattle and a fine to the King, and warned him to be more upright in future. The result was that her fame as a judge spread throughout the land, and every day her gates were beset with suitors whose causes she dealt with to the best of her ability, and to their entire satisfaction. Criminal prosecutions that involved the death-sentence or matters connected with witchcraft, however, she steadily refused to try, saying that the Inkosazana should not cause blood to flow. These things she left to the King and his Council, confining herself to such actions as in England would come before the Court of Chancery. Thus to her reputation as a spiritual queen, Rachel added that of an upright judge who could not be influenced by fear or bribes, the first, perhaps, that had ever been known in Zululand.

But she could not try such cases all day, the strain was too great, although in the end most of them

partook of the nature of arbitrations, since the parties involved, having come to the conclusion that it was not possible to deceive one so wise, grew truthful and submitted their differences to the decision of her wisdom.

After they were dismissed, which was always at noon, for she opened her court at seven and would not sit more than five hours, Rachel was left in her solitary state until the next morning, and oh! the hours hung heavy upon her hands. A messenger was despatched to Ramah, but after ten days he returned saying that the Tugela was in flood, and he could not cross it. She sent him out again, and a week later was told that he had been killed by a lion on his journey. Then another messenger was chosen, but what became of him she never knew.

It was about this time that Rachel learned that Ishmael, having recovered from his sickness, had escaped from Umgugundhlovo by night, whither none seemed to know. From that moment fears gathered thick upon the poor girl. She dreaded Ishmael and guessed that his departure without communicating with her boded her no good. Indeed, once or twice she almost wished that she had taken Noie's counsel and given him over to the justice of the King. Meanwhile of Noie herself nothing had been heard. She had vanished into the wilderness.

Living this strange and most unnatural life, Rachel's nerves began to give way. While she tried her cases she seemed stern and calm. But when the crowd of humble suitors had dispersed from the outer court in which she sat as a judge, and the shouts of the praisers rushing up and down beyond the fence and roaring out her titles had died away, and having dismissed the obsequious maidens who waited upon her, she retired to the solitude of her hut to rest—ah! then it was different. Then she lay down upon her bed of rich furs and at times burst into tears because she who

seemed to be a supernatural queen, was really but a white girl deserted by God and man.

Now it was the season of thunderstorms and almost every afternoon these dreadful tempests broke over her kraal which shook in the roll and crash of the meeting clouds, while beyond the fence the jagged lightning struck and struck again upon the ironstone of the hillside.

She had never feared such storms before, but now they terrified her. She dreaded their advent and the worst of it was that she must not show her dread, she who was supposed to rule and direct the lightning. Indeed, the bounteous rains which fell ensuring a full harvest after several years of drought, were universally attributed to the good influence of her presence in the land. In the same way when a thunderbolt struck the hut of a doctor who but a day or two before had openly declared his disbelief in her powers, killing him and his principal wife, and destroying his kraal by fire, the accident was attributed to her vengeance, or to that of the Heavens who were angry at this lack of faith. After this remarkable exhibition of supernatural strength, needless to say, the voice of adverse criticism was stayed ; Rachel became supreme.

But the storms passed, and when they had rolled away at length, doing her no hurt, and the sun shone out again, she would go and sit beneath the trees at the edge of the beautiful pool until the closing lilies and the chill of the air told her that night drew on.

Oh ! those long nights—how endless they seemed to Rachel in her loneliness. Now she who used to sleep so well, could not sleep, or when she slept she dreamed. She dreamed of her mother, always of her mother, that she was ill, and calling her, until she came to believe that in truth this was so. So much did this conviction work upon her mind, that she determined not to wait for the return of Noie, but at all costs to try to

leave Zululand, and through Tamboosa declared her will to the King. Next morning the answer came back that of course none could control her movements, but if she would go, she must fly, as all the rivers were in flood, as she might see if she would walk to the top of the mountain behind her kraal. Tamboosa added that a company of men who had been sent to recapture Ishmael, were kept for a week upon the banks of the first of them, and at length, being unable to cross, had returned, as her messenger had done. Knowing from other sources that this was true, Rachel made no answer. What she did not know, however, was that Ishmael had crossed the smaller rivers before the flood came down, and gone on to meet the soldiers, who were ordered to await him on the banks of the Tugela.

Escape was evidently impossible at present, and if it had been otherwise, clearly the Zulus did not mean to let her go. She must abide here in the company of her terrors and her dreams.

At length, happily for her, these distressing dreams of Rachel's began to be varied by others of a pleasanter complexion, of which, although they were vivid enough, she could only remember upon waking that they had to do with Richard Darrien, the companion of her adventure in the river, of whom she had heard nothing for so many years. For aught she knew he might have died long ago, and yet she did not think that he was dead. Well, if he lived he might have forgotten her, and yet she did not believe that he had forgotten her, he who as a boy had wished to follow her all his life, and whom she had thought of day by day from that hour to this. Yes, she had thought of him, but not thus. Why, at such a time, did he arise in strength before her, seeming to occupy all her soul? Why was her mind never free of him? Could it be that they were about to meet again? She shivered as the hope took hold of her, shivered with joy, and remembered that her mother had always said that they would meet. Could

it be that he of all men on the earth, for if he lived he was a man now, was coming to rescue her ? Oh ! then she would fear nothing. Then in every peril she would feel safe as a child in its mother's arms. No, the thing was too happy to come about ; her imagination played tricks with her, no more. And yet, and yet, why did he haunt her sleep ?

The dreary days went on ; a month had passed since Noie vanished over yonder ridge, and worst of all, for three nights the dreams of Richard had departed, while those of her mother remained.

Rachel was worn out ; she was in despair. All that morning she had spent in trying a long and heavy case, which occupied but wearied her mind, one of those eternal cases about the inheritance of cattle which were claimed by three brothers, descendants of different wives of a grandfather who had owned the herd. Finally she had effected a compromise between the parties, and amidst their salutes and acclamations, retired to her hut. But she could not eat ; the sameness of the food disgusted her. Neither could she rest, for the daily tempest was coming up, and the heavy atmosphere, or the electricity with which it was charged, and the over-powering heat, exasperated her nervous system and made sleep impossible. At length came the usual rush of icy wind and the bursting of the great storm. The thunder crashed and bellowed ; the lightning flickered and flared ; the rain fell in a torrent. It passed as it always did, and the sun shone out again. Gasping with relief, Rachel went out of the oven-like hut into the cool, sweet air, and sat down upon a tanned bull's hide which she had ordered her servants to spread for her by the pool of water upon the bank beneath the trees. It was very pleasant here, and the rain-drops shaken from the wet leaves fell upon her fevered face and hands and refreshed her.

She tried to forget her troubles for a little while,

and began to think of Richard Darrien, her boy-lover of a long-past hour, wondering what he looked like now that he was grown to be a man.

"If only you would come to help me! Oh! Richard, if only you would come to help me," the poor, worn-out girl murmured to herself, and so murmuring fell asleep.

Suddenly it seemed to her that she was wide awake, and staring into a part of the pool beneath her where the bottom was of granite and the water clear. In this water she saw a picture. She saw a great laager of wagons, and outside of one of them a group of bearded, jovial-looking men smoking and talking. Presently another man of sturdy build and resolute carriage, who was followed by a weary Kaffir, walked up to them. His back was towards her so that she could not see his face, but now she was able to hear all that was said, although the voices seemed thin and far away.

"What is it, Nephew?" asked the oldest of the bearded men, speaking in Dutch. "Why are you in such a hurry?"

"This, Uncle," he answered, in the same language, and in a pleasant voice that sounded familiar to Rachel's ears. "That spy, Quabi, whom we sent out a long time ago and who was reported dead, reached Dingaan's kraal, and has come back with a strange story."

"Almighty!" grunted the old man, "all these spies have strange stories, but let him tell it. Speak on, swartzel." *

Then the tired spy began to talk, telling a long tale. He described how he had got into Zululand, and reached Umgugundhlovo and lodged there with a relative of his, and done his best to collect information as to the attitude of the King and indunas towards the Boers. While he was there the news came that the white Spirit, who was called Inkosazana-y-Zoola, was

* Black-fellow.

approaching the kraal from Natal, where she dwelt with her parents who were teachers.

"Almighty!" interrupted the old man again, "What rubbish is this? How can a Spirit, white or black, have parents who are teachers?"

The weary-looking spy answered that he did not know, it was not for him to answer riddles, all he knew was that there was great excitement about the coming of this Queen of the Heavens, and he, being desirous of obtaining first-hand information, slipped out of the town with his relative, and walked more than a day's journey on the path that ran to the Tugela, till they came to a place where they hid themselves to see her pass. This place he described with minuteness, so minutely, indeed, that in her dream, Rachel recognised it well. It was the spot where the witch-doctoress had died. He went on with his story; he told of her appearance riding on the white horse and surrounded by an impi. He described her beauty, her white cloak, her hair hanging down her back, the rod of horn she carried in her hand, the colour of her eyes, the shape of her features, everything about her, as only a native can. Then he told of the incident of the cattle rushing across her path, of the death of the bull that charged her, of the appearance of the furious witch-doctoress who seized the rein of the horse, of the pointing of the wand and the instant execution of the woman.

He told of how he had followed the impi to the Great Place, of the story of Noie as he had heard it, and the reports that had reached him concerning the interview between the King and this white Inkosazana who, it was said, advised him not to fight the Boers.

"And where is she now?" asked the old Dutchman.

"There, at Umgugundhlovo," he answered, "ruling the land as its head Isanuzi, though it is said that she desires to escape, only the Zulus will not let her go."

"I think that we should find out more about this woman, especially as she seems to be a friend to our people," said the old Boer. "Now, who dares to go and learn the truth?"

"I will go," said the young man who had brought in the spy, and as he spoke he turned, and lo! *his face was the face of Richard Darrien*, bearded and grown to manhood, but without doubt Richard Darrien and none other.

"Why do you offer to undertake so dangerous a mission?" asked the Boer, looking at the young man kindly. "Is it because you wish to see this beautiful white witch of whom yonder Quabi tells us such lies, Nephew?"

The shadow of Richard nodded, and his face reddened, for the Boers around were laughing at him.

"That is right, Uncle," he answered boldly. "You think me a fool, but I am not. Many years ago I knew a little maid who was the daughter of a teacher, and who, if she lives, must have grown into much such a woman as Quabi describes. Well, I joined you Boers last year in order to look for that maid, and I am going to begin to look for her across the river yonder."

As the words reached whatever sense of Rachel's it was that heard them, of a sudden, in an instant, laager, Boers, and Richard vanished. In her sleep she tried to recreate them, at first without avail, then the curtain of darkness appeared to lift, and in the still water of the pool she saw another picture, that of Richard Darrien mounted on a black horse with one white foot, riding along a native path through a bush-clad country, while by his side trotted the spy whose name was Quabi.

They were talking together, and she heard, or, at any rate, knew their words.

"How far is it now to Umgugundhlovo?" asked Richard.

"Three days' journey, Inkosi, if we are not stopped by flooded rivers," answered Quabi.

For one second only Rachel saw and heard these things, then they, too, passed away, and she awoke to see in front of her the pool empty save for its lilies, and above to hear the whispering of the evening wind among the trees.

CHAPTER XIII

RICHARD COMES

As the sun set Rachel rose and walked to her hut. She was utterly dazed, she could not understand. Was this but a fiction of an overwrought and disordered mind, or had she seen a vision of things passing, or that had passed, far away? If it were a dream, then this was but another drop in her cup of bitterness. If a true vision—oh! then what did it mean to her? It meant that Richard Darrien lived, Richard, of whom her heart had been full for years. It meant that his heart was full of her also, for had she not seemed to hear him say that he had travelled from the Cape with the Boers to look for her, and was he not journeying alone through a hostile land to pursue his search? Who would do such a thing for the sake of a girl unless—unless? It meant that he would protect her, would rescue her from her terrible plight, would take her from among these savages to her home again—oh! and perhaps much more that she did not dare to picture to herself.

Yet how could such things be? They were contrary to experience, at any rate, to the experience of white folk, though natives would believe in them easily enough. Yet in Nature things might be possible which were generally held to be impossible. Her mother had certain gifts—had she, perhaps, inherited them? Had her helplessness appealed to the pity of some higher power? Had her ceaseless prayers been heard? Yet, why should the universal

laws be stretched for her ? Why should she be allowed to lift a corner of the black veil of ignorance that hems us in, and see a glimpse of what lies beyond ? If Richard were really coming, in a day or two she would have learned of his arrival naturally ; there was no need that these mysterious influences should be set to work to inform her of his approach.

How selfish she was. The warning might concern him, not her. It was probable enough that the Zulus would kill a solitary white man, especially if they discovered that he proposed to visit their Inkosazana. Well, she had the power to protect him. If she " threw her mantle " over him, no man in all the land would dare to do him violence. Surely it was for this reason that she had been allowed to learn these things, if she had learned them, not for her own sake, but his. *If* she had learned them ! Well, she would take the risk, would run the chance of failure and of mockery, yes, and of the loss of her power among these people. It should be done at once.

Rachel clapped her hands, and a maiden appeared whom she bade summon the captain of the guard without the gate. Presently he came, surrounded by a band of her women, since no man might visit the Inkosazana alone. Bidding him to cease from his salutations, she commanded him to go swiftly to the Great Place and pray of Dingaan that he would send her an escort and a litter, as she must see him that night on a matter which would not brook delay.

In an hour, just after she had finished her food, which she ate with more appetite than she had known for days, it was reported that they were there. Throwing on her white cloak, and taking her horn wand, she entered the litter and, guarded by a hundred men, was borne swiftly to the House of Dingaan. At its gate she descended, and once more entered that court by the moonlight.

As before, there sat the King and his indunas without the Great Hut, and while she walked towards them every man rose crying, "Hail! Inkosazana." Yes, even Dingaan, mountain of flesh though he was, struggled from his stool and saluted her. Rachel acknowledged the salutation by raising her wand, motioned to them to be seated, and waited.

"Art thou come, White One," asked Dingaan, "to make clear those dark words thou spokest to us a moon ago?"

"Nay, King," she answered, "what I said then, I said once and for all. Read thou the saying as thou wilt, or let the Ghost-people interpret it to thee. Hear me, King and Councillors. Ye have kept me here when I would be gone, my business being ended, that I might be a judge among this people. Ye have told me that the rivers were in flood, that the beast I rode was sick, that evil would befall the land if I deserted you. Now I know, and ye know, that if it pleased me I could have departed when and whither I would, but it was not fitting that the Inkosazana should creep out of Zululand like a thief in the night, so I abode on in my house yonder. Yet my heart grew wrath with you, and I, to whom the white people listen also, was half minded to bring hither the thousands of the Amaboona who are encamped beyond the Buffalo River, that they might escort me to my home."

Now at these bold words the King looked uneasy, and one of the councillors whispered to another,

"How knows she that the white men are camped beyond the Buffalo?"

"Yet," went on Rachel, "I did not do so, for then there must have been much fighting and bloodshed, and blood I hate. But I have done this. With these Amaboona travels an English chief, a young man, one Darrien, whom I knew from long years ago, and who does me reverence. Him, then, I have commanded to journey hither, and to lead me to my own place

across the Tugela. To-night I am told he sleeps a short three days' journey from this town, and I am come here to bid you send out swift messengers to guide him hither."

She ceased, and they stared at her awhile. Then the King asked,

"What messenger is it, Inkosazana, that thou hast sent to this white chief, Dario? We have seen none pass from thy house."

"Dost thou think then, King, that thou canst see my messengers? My thoughts flew from me to him, and called in his ear in the night, and I saw his coming in the still pool that lies near my huts."

"*Ow!*" exclaimed one of the Council, "she sent her thoughts to him like birds, and she saw his coming in the water of the pool. Great is the magic of the Inkosazana."

"The chief, Darrien," went on Rachel, without heeding the interruption, although she noted that it was Mopo of the withered hand who had spoken from beneath the blanket wrapped about his head, "may be known thus. He is fair of face, with eyes like my eyes, and beard and hair of the colour of gold. If I saw right, he rides upon a black horse with one white foot and his only companion is a Kaffir named Quabi who, I think," and she passed her hand across her forehead, "yes, who was surely visiting a relation of his, at this, the Great Place, when I crossed the Tugela."

Now the King asked if any knew of this Quabi, and an induna answered in an awed voice, that it was true that a man so called had been in the town at the time given by the Inkosazana, staying with a soldier whose name he mentioned, but who was now away on service. He had, however, departed before the Inkosazana arrived, or so he believed, whither he knew not.

"I thought it was so," went on Rachel. "As I saw him in the pool he is a thin man whose shoulders stoop,

and whose beard is white, although his hair is black. He wears no ring upon his head."

"That is the man," said the induna, "being a stranger I noted him well, as it was my business to do."

"Summon the messengers swiftly, King," went on Rachel, "and let them depart at once, for know that this white chief and his servant are under the protection of the Heavens, and if harm comes to them, then I lay my curse upon the land, and it shall break up in blood and ruin. Bid them say to Darrien, that the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, she who stood with him once on the rock in the river while the lightnings fell and the lions roared about them, sends him greetings and awaits him."

Now Dingaan turned to an induna and said,

"Go, do the bidding of the Inkosazana. Bid swift runners search out this white chief, and lead him to her house, and remember that if aught of ill befalls him, those men die, and thou diest also."

The induna leapt up and departed, and Rachel also made ready to go. A moment later the captain of the gate entered, fell upon his knees before Dingaan, and said,

"O King, tidings."

"What are they, man?" he asked.

"King, the watchmen report that it has been called from hilltop to hilltop that a white man who rides a black horse, has crossed the Buffalo, and travels towards the Great Place. What is thy pleasure? Shall he be killed or driven back?"

"When did that news come?" asked the King in the silence which followed this announcement.

"Not a minute gone," he answered. "The inner watchman ran with it, and is without the gates. There has been no other tidings from the West for days."

"Thy watchmen call but slowly, King, the water in the pool speaks swifter," said Rachel, then still in

the midst of a heavy silence, for this thing was fearful to them, she turned and departed.

"So it is true, so it is true!" Rachel kept repeating to herself, the words suiting themselves to the time of the footfall of her bearers. She was spent with all the labour and emotions of that long day, culminating in the last scene, when she must play her dangerous, superhuman part before these keen-witted savages. She could think no more; scarcely could she undress and throw herself upon her bed in the hut. Yet that night she slept soundly, better than she had done since Noie went away. No dreams came to trouble her and in the morning she woke refreshed.

But now doubts did come. Might she not be mistaken after all? She knew the marvellous powers of the natives in the matter of the transmission of news, powers so strange that many, even among white people, attributed them to witchcraft. She had no doubt, therefore, as to the fact of some Englishman or Boer having entered Zululand. Doubtless the news of his arrival had been conveyed over scores of miles of country by the calling of it as the captain said, from hill to hill, or in some other fashion. But might not this arrival and the circumstance of her dream or vision be a mere coincidence? What was there to show that the stranger who was riding a black horse was really Richard Darrien? Perhaps it was all a mistake, and he was only one of those white wanderers of the stamp of the outcast Ishmael who, even at that date, made their way into savage countries for the purposes of gain or to enjoy a life of licence. And yet, and yet Quabi, of whom she also dreamed, had visited the Great Place—as she dreamed.

The next two days were terrible to Rachel. She endured them as she had endured all those that went before, trying the cases that were brought to her, keeping up her appearance of distant dignity and utter indifference. She asked no questions, since

to do so would be to show doubt and weakness, although she was aware that the tale of her vision had spread through the land, and that the issue of the matter was of intense interest to thousands. From some talk which she overheard while she pretended to be listening to evidence, she learned even that two men going to execution had discussed it, saying that they regretted they would not live to know the truth. On the second day she did hear one piece of news, for although she sat by her pool and again tried to sleep by its waters, these remained blind and dumb.

The induna, Tamboosa, on one of his ceremonial visits, after speaking of the health of her mare, which, it seemed was improving, mentioned incidentally that the messengers running night and day had met the white man and "called back" that he was safe and well. He added that had it not been for her vision this said white man would certainly have been killed as a spy.

"Yes, I knew that," answered Rachel, indifferently, although her heart thumped within her bosom. "I forget if I said that the Inkosi was to be brought straight here when he arrives. If not, let it be known that such is my command. The King can receive him afterwards if it pleases him to do so, as probably we shall not depart until the next day."

Then she yawned, and as though by an afterthought asked if any news had been "called back" from Noie.

Tamboosa answered, No; no system of intelligence had been organised in the direction in which she had gone, for that country was empty of enemies, and indeed of population. However, this would not distress the Inkosazana, who had only to consult her Spirit to see all that happened to her servant.

Rachel replied that of course this was so, but as a matter of fact she had not troubled about the matter, then waved her hand to show that the interview was at an end.

It was the morning of the third day, and while Rachel was delivering judgment in a case, a messenger entered and whispered something to the induna on duty, who rose and saluted her.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Only this, Inkosazana; the white Inkoos from the Buffalo River has arrived, and is without."

"Good," said Rachel, "let him wait there." Then she went on with her judgment. Yes, she went on, although her eyes were blind, and the blood beating in her ears sounded like the roll of drums. She finished it, and after a decent interval, bowed her head in acknowledgment of the customary salutes, and made the sign which intimated that the Court was to be cleared.

Slowly, slowly, all the crowd melted away, leaving her alone with her women.

"Go," she said to one of them, "and bid the captain admit this white chief. Say that he is to come unarmed and alone. Then depart, all of you. If I should need you I will call."

The girl went on her errand while her companions filed away through the back gate of the inner fence. Rachel glanced round to make sure of her solitude. It was complete, no one was left. There she sat in state upon her carved stool, her wand in her hand, her white cloak upon her shoulders, and the sunlight that passed over the round of the hut behind her glinting on her hair till it shone like a crown of gold, but leaving her face in shadow; sat quite still like some lovely tinted statue.

The gate of the inner fence opened and closed again after a man who entered. He walked forward a few paces, then stood still, for the flood of light that revealed him so clearly at first prevented him from seeing her seated in the shadow. Oh! there could be no further doubt—before her was Richard Darrien, the lad grown to manhood, from whom she had parted so many years ago. Now, as then, he was not tall,

"He . . . kissed her on the lips"
(*see page 181*).

though very strongly built, and for the rest, save for his short beard, the change in him seemed little. The same clear, thoughtful, grey eyes, the same pleasant, open face, the same determined mouth. She was not disappointed in him, she knew this at once. She liked him as well as she had done at the first.

Now he caught sight of her and stayed there, staring. She tried to speak, to welcome him, but could not, no words would come. He also seemed to be smitten with dumbness, and thus the two of them remained a while. At last he took off his hat almost mechanically, as though from instinct, and said vaguely,

"You are the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, are you not?"

"I am so called," she answered softly, and with effort.

The moment that he heard her voice, with a movement so swift that it was almost a spring, he advanced to her, saying,

"Now I am sure; you are Rachel Dove, the little girl who—Oh, Rachel, how lovely you have grown!"

"I am glad you think so, Richard," she answered again in the same low, deep voice, a voice laden with the love within her, and reddening to her eyes. Then she let fall her wand, and rising, stretched out both her hands to him.

They were face to face, now, but he did not take those hands; he passed his arms about her, drew her to him unresisting, and kissed her on the lips. She slipped from his embrace down on to her stool, white now as she had been red. Then while he stood over her, trembling and confused, Rachel looked up, her beautiful eyes filled with tears, and whispered,

"Why should I be ashamed? It is Fate."

"Yes," he answered, "Fate."

For so both of them knew it to be. Though they had seen each other but once before, their love was so

great, the bond between their natures so perfect and complete, that this outward expression of it would not be denied. Here was a mighty truth which burst through all wrappings of convention and proclaimed itself in its pure strength and beauty. That kiss of theirs was the declaration of an existent unity which circumstances did not create, nor their will control, and thus they confessed it to each other.

"How long?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Eight years to-day," he answered, "since I rode away after those waggons."

"Eight years," she repeated, "and no word from you all that time. You have behaved badly to me, Richard."

"No, no, I could not find out. I wrote three times, but always the letters were returned, except one that went to the wrong people, who were angry about it. Then two years ago, I heard that your father and mother had been in Natal, but had gone to England, and that you were dead. Yes, a man told me that you were dead," he added with a gulp. "I suppose he was speaking of somebody else, as he could not remember whether the name was Dove or Cove, or perhaps he was just lying. At any rate, I did not believe him. I always felt that you were alive."

"Why did you not come to see, Richard?"

"Why? Because it was impossible. For years my father was an invalid, paralysed; and I was his only child, and could not leave him."

She looked a question at him.

"Yes," he answered with a nod, "dead, ten months ago, and for a few weeks I had to remain to arrange about the property, of which he left a good deal, for we did well of late years. Just then I heard a rumour of an English missionary and his wife and daughter who were said to be living somewhere beyond the boundaries of Natal, in a savage place on

the Transvaal side of the Drakensberg, and as some Boers I knew were trekking into that country I came with them on the chance—a pretty poor one, as the story was vague enough."

"You came—you came to seek the girl, Rachel Dove?"

"Of course. Otherwise why should I have left my farms down in the Cape to risk my neck among these savages?"

"And then," went on Rachel, "you or somebody else sent in the spy, Quabi, who returned to the Boer camp with his story about the Inkosazana-y-Zoola. You remember you brought him in limping to that old fellow with a grey beard and a large pipe, and the others who laughed at the tale. I mean when you said that this Inkosazana seemed very like an English maid, 'the daughter of a teacher,' whom you were looking for, and that you would go to find out the truth of the business."

"Yes, that's all right; but Rachel," he added with a start, "how do you know anything about it—Oom Piet and the rest, and the words I used? Your spies must be very good and quick, for you can't have seen Quabi."

"My spies are good and quick. Did you get my message sent by the King's men? It was that she who stood with you on the rock in the river, greeted you and awaited you?"

"Yes, I could not understand. I do not understand now. Just before that they were going to kill me as a Boer spy. Who told you everything?"

"My heart," she answered smiling. "I dreamed it all. I suppose that I was allowed to save your life that I might bring you here to save me. Listen now, Richard, while I tell you the strangest story that you ever heard; and if you don't believe it, go and ask the King and his indunas."

Then she told him of her vision by the pool and

all that happened after it. When she had finished Richard could only shake his head and say:

"Still I don't understand; but no wonder these Zulus have made a goddess of you. Well, Rachel, what is to happen now? If you are to stop here they mayn't care for me as a high priest."

"I am not; I am going home, and you must take me. I told them that you were coming to do so. You have your horse, have you not, the black horse with the white forefoot? Well, we will start at once—no, you must eat first, and there are things to arrange. Now stand at a distance from me and look as respectful as you can, for I fill a strange position here."

Then Rachel clapped her hands and the women came running in.

"Bring food for the Inkosi Darrien," she said, "and send hither the captain of the gate."

Presently the man arrived crouched up in token of respect, and shouting her titles.

"Go to the King," said Rachel, "and tell him the Inkosazana commands that the horse on which she came be brought to her at once, as she leaves Zululand for a while; also that an impi be assembled within an hour to escort her and this white chief, her servant, to the Tugela. Say that the Inkosi Darrien has brought her tidings which make it needful that she should travel hence speedily if the Zulus, her people, are to be saved from great misfortune, and say, too, that he goes with her. If the King or his indunas would see the Inkosazana, or the chief Darrien, let him or the indunas meet them on their road, since they have no time to visit the Great Place. Let Tamboosa be in command of the impi, and say also that if it is not here at once, the Inkosazana will be angry and summon an impi of her own. Go now, for the lives of many hang upon your speed; yes, the lives of the greatest in the land."

The man saluted and shot away like an arrow.

"Will they obey you?" asked Richard.

"I think so, because they are afraid of me, especially since I saw you coming. At any rate we must act at once, it is our best chance—before they have time to think. Here is some food—eat. Woman, go, tell the guard that the Inkosi's horse must be fed at the gate, for he will need it presently, and his servant also."

"I have no servant, Inkosazana," broke in Richard. "I left Quabi at a kraal fifty miles away, laid up with a cut foot. As soon as he is better he will slip back across the Buffalo River."

Then while Richard ate, which he did heartily enough, for joy had made him very hungry, they talked, who had much to tell. He asked her why she thought it necessary to leave Zululand at once. She answered, for two reasons, first because of her desperate anxiety about her father and mother, as to whom her heart foreboded ill, and secondly for his own sake. She explained that the Zulus who had set her up as an image or a token of the guiding Spirit of their nation, were madly jealous concerning her, so jealous that if he remained here long she was by no means certain that even her power could protect him when they came to understand that he was much to her. It was impossible that she could see him often, and much more so that he could remain in her kraal. Therefore if they were detained he would be obliged to live at some distance from her where an assegai might find him at night or poison be put in his food. At present they were impressed by her foreknowledge of his arrival, and that was why he had been admitted to her at once. But this would wear off—and then who could say, especially if Ishmael returned?

He asked who Ishmael was and what he had to do with her. Rachel told him briefly, and though

she suppressed much, he looked very grave at that story.

While she was finishing it a woman called without for leave to enter, and, as before, Rachel bade him stand in a respectful attitude, and at a distance from her. Richard obeyed, and the woman came in to say that certain of the King's indunas craved audience with her. They were admitted and saluted her in their usual humble fashion, but of Richard, beyond eyeing him curiously and, as she thought, hostilely, they took not the slightest heed.

"Are all things ready for my journey, as I commanded?" asked Rachel at once.

"Inkosazana," answered their spokesman, "they are ready, for how canst thou be disobeyed? Tamboosa and the impi wait without. Yet, Inkosazana, the heart of the Black One and the hearts of his councillors, and of all the Zulu people are cut in two because thou wouldst go and leave them mourning. Their hearts are sore also with this white man Dario, who has come to lead thee hence, so sore, that were he not thy servant," the induna added grimly, "he at least should stay in Zululand."

"He is my servant," answered Rachel haughtily, "whom I sent for. Let that suffice. Remember my words, all of you, and let them be told again in the ears of the King, that if any harm comes to this white chief who is my guest and yours, then there will be blood between me and the people of the Zulus that shall be terribly avenged in blood."

The indunas seemed to cower at this declaration, but made no answer. Only the chief of them said:

"The King would know if the Inkosi, thy servant, brings thee any tidings of the Amaboona, the white folk with whom he has been journeying."

"He brings tidings that they seek peace with the Zulus, to whom they will do no hurt if no hurt is

done to them. Shall I tell them that the Zulus also seek peace ? "

" The King gave us no message on that matter, Inkosazana," replied the induna. " He awaits the coming of the prophets of the Ghost-folk to interpret the meaning of thy words, and of the omen of the falling star."

" So be it," said Rachel. " When my servant, Noie, returns, let her be sent on to me at once, that I may hear and consider the words of her people," and she began to rise from her seat to intimate that the interview was finished.

" Inkosazana," said the induna hurriedly, " one question from the King—when dost thou return to Zululand ? "

" I return when it is needful. Fear not, I think that I shall return, but I say to the King and to all of you: Be careful when I come that there is no blood between me and you, lest great evil fall upon your heads from Heaven. I have spoken. Good fortune go with you till we meet again."

The indunas looked at each other, then rose and departed humbly as they had entered.

An hour later, surrounded by the impi, and followed by Richard, Rachel was on the Tugela road. At the crest of a hill she pulled rein and looked back at the great kraal, Umgugundhlovu. Then she beckoned Richard to her side and said :

" I think that before long I shall see that hateful place again."

" Why ? " he asked.

" Because of the way in which those indunas looked at each other just now. There was some evil secret in their eyes. Richard, I am afraid."

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT CHANCED AT RAMAH

THE news which reached Rachel that Ishmael had been ill after the rough handling of the captains in her presence, was true enough. For many days he was far too ill to travel, and when he recovered sufficiently to start he could only journey slowly to the Tugela.

It will be remembered that she was told that he had escaped, as indeed he seemed to do, slipping off at night, but this escape of his was carefully arranged beforehand, nor did any attempt to re-capture him upon his way. When at length he came to the river he found the small impi awaiting him, not knowing whither they were to go or what they were to do, their only orders being that they must obey him in all things. He found also that the Tugela was in furious flood, so that to ford it proved quite impossible. Here, then, he was obliged to remain for ten full days while the water ran down.

Ishmael was not idle during those ten days, which he spent in recovering his health, and incidentally in reflection. Thus he thought a great deal of his past life, and did not find the record satisfactory. With his exact history we need not trouble ourselves. He was well-born, as he had told Rachel, but had been badly brought up. His strong passions had led him into trouble while young, and instead of trying to reform him his belongings had cast him off. Then he had enlisted in the army, and so reached South Africa.

There he committed a crime—as a matter of fact it was murder or something like it—and fled from justice far into the wilderness, where a touch of imagination prompted him to take the name of Ishmael.

For a while this new existence suited him well enough. Thus he had wives in plenty of a sort, and he grew rich, becoming just such a person as might be expected from his environment and unchecked natural tendencies. At length it happened that he met Rachel, who awoke in him certain forgotten associations. She was an English lady, and he remembered that once he had been an English gentleman, years and years ago. Also she was beautiful, which appealed to his strong animal nature, and spiritual, which appealed to a materialist soaked in Kaffir superstition. So he fell in love with her, really in love; that is to say, he came to desire to make her his wife more than he desired anything else on earth. For her sake he grew to dislike his black consorts, however handsome; even the heaping up of herds of cattle after the native fashion ceased to appeal to him. He wanted to live as his forbears had lived, quietly, respectably, with a woman of his own class.

So he made advances to her, with the results we know. For fifteen years or more he had been a savage, and he could not hide his savagery from her eyes any more than he could break off the ties and entanglements that had grown up about him. Had she happened to care for him, it is very possible, however, that in this he would have succeeded in time. He might even have reformed himself completely, and died in old age a much-respected colonial gentleman; perhaps a member of the local Legislature. But she did not; she detested him; she knew him for what he was, a cowardly outcast whose good looks did not appeal to her. So the spark of his new aspirations was trampled out beneath her merciless heel, and there remained only the acquired savagery and

superstition mixed with the inborn instincts of a blackguard.

It was this superstition of his that had brought all her troubles upon Rachel, for however it came about, he had conceived the idea that she was something more than an ordinary woman and, with many tales of her mysterious origin and powers, imparted it to the Zulus, in whose minds it was fostered by the accident of the coincidence of her native name and personal loveliness with those of the traditional white Spirit of their race, and by Mopo's identification of her with that Spirit. Thus she became their goddess and his; at any rate for a time. But while they desired to worship her only, and use her rumoured wisdom as an oracle, he sought to make her his wife; the more impossible it became, the more he sought it. She refused him with contumely, and he laid plots to decoy her to Zululand, thinking that there she would be in his power. In the end he succeeded, basely enough, only to find that he was in her power, and that the contumely, and more, were still his share.

But all this did not in the least deter him from his aim, and as it chanced, fortune had put other cards into his hand. He knew that Rachel would not stay among the Zulus, as they knew it. Therefore they had commissioned him to bring her people to her. If her people were not brought he was sure that she would come to seek them, and *if she found no one*, then where could she go, or at least who would be at hand to help her? Surely his opportunity had come at last, and marriage by capture did not occur to him, who had spent so many years among savages, as a crime from which to shrink. Only he feared that the prospective captive, the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, was not one with whom it was safe to trifle. But his love was stronger than his fear. He thought that he would take the risk.

Such were the reflections of Ishmael upon the banks

of the flooded Tugela, and when at length the waters went down sufficiently to enable him and the soldiers under his command to cross into Natal, he was fully determined to put them into practice, if the chance came his way. How this might best be done he left to luck, for if it could be avoided he did not wish to have more blood upon his hands. Only Rachel must be rendered homeless and friendless, for then who could protect her from him? An answer came into his mind—she might protect herself, or that Power which seemed to go with her might protect her. Something warned him that this evil enterprise was very dangerous. Yet the fire that burnt within him drove him on to face the danger.

Ishmael was still on the Zululand bank of the river when one day about noon an urgent message reached him from Dingaan. It said that the King was angry as a wounded buffalo to learn, as he had just done, that he, Ibubesi, still lingered on his road, and had not carried out his mission. The Inkosazana, accompanied by a white man, was travelling to Ramah, and unless he went forward at once, would overtake him. Therefore he must march instantly, and bring back the old Teacher and his wife as he had been bidden. Should he meet the Inkosazana and her companion as he returned with the white prisoners she must not be touched or insulted in any way, only his ears and those of the soldiers with him were to be deaf to her orders or entreaties to release them, for then she would surely turn and follow of her own accord back to the Great Place. If the white man with her made trouble or resisted, he was to be bound, but on no account must his blood be made to flow, for if this happened it would bring a curse upon the land, and he, Dingaan, swore by the head of the Black One who was gone (that is Chaka) that he would kill him, Ibubesi, in payment. Yes, he would smear him with honey and bind him over an ant-heap in the sun

till he died, if he hunted Africa from end to end to catch him. Moreover, should he fail in the business, he would send a regiment and destroy his town at Mafooti, and put his wives and people to the spear, and seize his cattle. All this also he swore by the head of the Black One.

Now when Ishmael received this message he was much frightened, for he knew that these were not idle threats. Indeed, the exhausted messenger told him that never had any living man seen Dingaan so mad with rage as he was when he learned that he, Ibubesi, was still lingering on the banks of the Tugela, adding that he had foamed at the mouth with fury and uttered terrible threats. Ishmael sent him back with a humble answer, pointing out that it had been impossible to cross the river, which was "in wrath," but that now he would do all things as he was commanded, and especially that not a hair of the white man's head should be harmed.

"Then you must do them quickly," said the messenger with a grim smile as he rose and prepared to go, "for know that the Inkosazana is not more than half a day's march behind you, accompanied by the white Inkoos Dario."

"What is this Dario like?" asked Ishmael.

"Oh! he is young and very handsome, with hair and beard of gold, and eyes that are such as those of the Inkosazana herself. Some say that he is her brother, another child of the Heavens, and some that he is her husband. Who am I that I should speak of such high things? But it is evident that she loves him very much, for by her magic she told the King of his coming, and even when he is behind her she is always trying to turn her head to look at him."

"Oh! she loves him very much, does she?" said Ishmael, setting his white teeth. Then he turned, and calling the captain of the impi, gave orders that the river must be crossed at once, for so the King

commanded, and it was better to die with honour by water than with shame by the spear.

So they waded and swam the river with great difficulty, but, as it chanced, without loss of life, Ishmael being borne over it upon the shoulders of the strongest men. Upon its further bank he summoned the captains and delivered to them the orders of the King. Then they set out for Ramah, Ishmael carried in a litter made of boughs.

Whilst the soldiers were constructing this litter, he called two men of the Swamp-dwellers, who had their homes upon the banks of the Tugela, and promising them a reward, bade them run to his town, Mafooti, and tell his head man there to come at once with thirty of the best soldiers, and to hide them in the bush of the kloof above Ramah, where he would join them that night. The men, who knew Ibubesi, and what happened to those who failed upon his business, went swiftly, and a little while afterwards, the litter being finished, Ishmael entered it, and the impi started for Ramah.

Before sundown they appeared upon a ridge overlooking the settlement, just as the herds were driving the cattle into their kraals. Seeing the Zulus while as yet they were some way off, these herds shouted an alarm, whereon the people of the place, thinking that Dingaan had sent a regiment to wipe them out, fled to the bush, the herds driving the cattle after them. Man, woman, and child, deserting their pastor, who knew nothing of all this, being occupied with a sad business, they fled, incontinently, so that when Ishmael and the impi entered Ramah, no one was left in it save a few aged and sick people, who could not walk.

At the outskirts of the town Ishmael descended from his litter and commanded the soldiers to surround it, with orders that they were to hurt no one, but if the white Umfundusi, who was called Shouter, or his

wife attempted to escape, they were to be seized and brought to him. Then taking with him some of the captains and a guard of ten men, he advanced to the mission-house.

The door was open, and, followed by the Zulus, he entered to search the place, for he feared that its inhabitants might have seen them, and have gone with the others. Looking into the first room that they reached, of which, as it chanced, the door was also open, Ishmael saw that this was not so, for there upon the bed lay Mrs. Dove, apparently very ill, while by the side of the bed knelt her husband, praying. For a few moments Ishmael and the savages behind him stood still, staring at the pair, till suddenly Mrs. Dove turned her head and saw them. Lifting herself in the bed she pointed with her finger, and Ishmael noticed that her lips were quite blue, and that she did not seem to be able to speak. Then Mr. Dove, observing her outstretched hand, looked round. He had not seen Ishmael since that day when he struck him after their stormy interview at Mafooti, but recognising the man at once, he asked sternly:

"What are you doing, sir, with these savages in my house? Cannot you see that my wife is sick, and must not be disturbed?"

"I am sorry," Ishmael answered shamefacedly, for in his heart he was afraid of Mr. Dove, "but I am sent to you with a message from Dingaan the King, and," he added as an afterthought, "from your daughter."

"From my daughter!" exclaimed Mr. Dove eagerly. "What of her? Is she well? We cannot get any certain news of her, only rumours."

"I saw her but once," replied Ishmael, "and she was well enough then. You know the Zulus have made her their Inkosazana, and keep her guarded."

"Does she live quite alone then with these savages?"

"She did, but I am sorry I must tell you that she seems to have a companion now, some scoundrel of a white man with whom she has taken up," he sneered.

"My daughter take up with a scoundrel of a white man! It is false. What is this man's name?"

"I don't know, but the natives call him Dario, and say that he is young, and has fair hair, and that she is in love with him. That's all I can tell you about the man."

Mr. Dove shook his head, but his wife sat up suddenly in bed, and plucked him by the sleeve, for she had been listening intently to everything that passed.

"Dario! Young, fair hair, in love with him—" she repeated in a thick whisper, then added, "John, it is Richard Darrien grown up—the boy who saved her in the Umtooma River, years ago, and whom she has never forgotten. Oh! thank God! Thank God! With him she will be safe. I always knew that he would find her, for they—belong to each other," and she sank back exhausted.

"That's what the Zulus say, that they belong to each other," replied Ishmael, with another sneer. "Perhaps they are married native fashion."

"Stop insulting my daughter, sir," said Mr. Dove angrily. "She would not take a husband as you take your wives, nor if this man is Richard Darrien, as I pray, would he be a party to such a thing. Tell me, are they coming here?"

"Not they, they are far too comfortable where they are. Also the Zulus would prevent them. But don't be sad about it, for I am sent to take you both to join her at the Great Place where you are to live."

"To join her! It is impossible," ejaculated Mr. Dove, glancing at his sick wife.

"Impossible or not, you've got to come at once, both of you. That is the King's order and the Inkosazana's wish, and what is more there is an impi

outside to see that you obey. Now I give you five minutes to get ready, and then we start."

"Man, are you mad? How can my wife travel to Zululand in her state? She cannot walk a step."

"Then she can be carried," answered Ishmael callously. "Come, don't waste time in talking. Those are my orders, and I am not going to have my throat cut for either of you. If Mrs. Dove won't dress, wrap her up in blankets."

"You go, John, you go," whispered his wife, "or they will kill you. Never mind about me; my time has come, and I die happy, for Richard Darrien is with Rachel."

The mention of Richard's name seemed to infuriate Ishmael. At any rate he said brutally:

"Are you coming, or must I use force?"

"Coming, you wicked villain! How can I come?" shouted Mr. Dove, for he was mad with grief and rage. "Be off with your savages. I will shoot the first man who lays a finger on my wife," and as he spoke he snatched a double-barrelled pistol which hung upon the wall and cocked it.

Ishmael turned to the Zulus who stood behind him watching this scene with curiosity.

"Seize the Shouter," he said, "and bind him. Lift the old woman on her mattress, and carry her. If she dies on the road we cannot help it."

The captains hesitated, not from fear, but because Mrs. Dove's condition moved even their savage hearts to pity.

"Why do you not obey?" roared Ishmael. "Dogs and cowards, it is the King's word. Take her up or you shall die, every man of you, you know how. Knock down the old Evildoer with your sticks if he gives trouble."

Now the men hesitated no longer. Springing forward, several of them seized the mattress and began to lift it bodily. Mrs. Dove rose and tried to

struggle from the bed, then uttered a low moaning cry, fell back, and lay still.

"You devils, you have killed her!" gasped Mr. Dove, as lifting the pistol he fired at the Zulu nearest to him, shooting him through the body so that he sank upon the floor dying. Then, fearing lest he should shoot again, the captains fell upon the poor old man, striking him with kerries and the handles of their spears, for they sought to disable him and make him drop the pistol.

As it chanced, though this was not their intention, in the confusion a heavy blow from a knobstick struck him on the temple. The second barrel of the pistol went off, and the bullet from it but just missed Ishmael who was standing to one side. When the smoke cleared away it was seen that Mr. Dove had fallen backwards on to the bed. The martyrdom he always sought and expected had overtaken him. He was quite dead. They were both dead!

The head induna in command of the impi stepped forward and looked at them, then felt their hearts.

"*Wow!*" he said, "these white people have 'gone beyond.' They have gone to join the spirits, both of them. What now, Ibubesi?"

Ishmael, who stood in the corner, very white-faced, and staring with round eyes, for the tragedy had taken a turn that he did not intend or expect, shook himself and rubbed his forehead with his hand, answering:

"Carry them to the Great Place, I suppose. The King ordered that they should be brought there. Why did you kill that old Shouter, you fools?" he added with irritation. "You have brought his blood and the curse of the Inkosazana on our heads."

"*Wow!*" answered the induna again, "you bade us strike him with sticks, and our orders were to obey you. Who would have guessed that the old man's skull was so thin from thinking? You or I

would never have felt a tap like that. But they are 'gone beyond,' and we will not defile ourselves by touching them. Dead bones are of no use to anyone, and their ghosts might haunt us. Come, brethren, let us go back to the King and make report. The order was Ibubesi's, and we are not to blame."

"Yes," they answered, "let us go back and make report. Are you coming, Ibubesi?"

"Not I," he answered. "Do I want to have my neck twisted because of your clumsiness? Go you and win your own peace if you can, but if you see the Inkosazana, my advice is that you avoid her lest she learn the truth, and bring your deaths upon you, for, know, she travels hither, and she called these folk father and mother."

"Without doubt we will avoid her," said the captain, "who fear her terrible curse. But, Ibubesi, it is on you that it will fall, not on us who did but obey you as we were bidden; yes, on you she will bring down death before this moon dies. Make your peace with the Heavens, if you can, Ibubesi, as we go to try to make ours with the King."

"Would you bewitch me, you ill-omened dog?" shouted Ishmael, wiping the sweat of fear off his brow. "May you soon be stiff!"

"Nay, nay, Ibubesi, it is you who shall be stiff. The Inkosazana will see to that, and were I not sure of it I would make you so myself, who am a noble who will not be called names by a white *umfagozan*, a low-born fellow who plots for blood, but leaves its shedding to brave men. Farewell, Ibubesi; if the jackals leave anything of you after the Inkosazana has spoken, we will return to bury your bones," and he turned to go.

"Stay," cried the dying man on the floor, "would you leave me here in pain, my brothers?"

The induna stepped to him and examined him.

"It is mortal," he said, shaking his head, "right

through the liver. Why did not the white man's thunder smite Ibubesi instead of you, and save the Inkosazana some trouble? Well, your arms are still strong and here is a spear; you know where to strike. Be quick with your messages. Yes, yes, I will see that they are delivered. Good-night, my brother. Do you remember how we stood side by side in that big fight twenty years ago, when the Pondo giant got me down and you fell on the top of me and thrust upwards and killed him? It was a very good fight, was it not? We will talk it over again in the World of Spirits. Good-night, my brother. Yes, yes, I will deliver the message to your little girl, and tell her where the necklace is to be found, and that you wish her to name her firstborn son after you. Good-night. Use that assegai at once, for your wound must be painful, or perhaps as you are down upon the ground Ibubesi will do it for you. Good-night, my brother, and Ibubesi, good-night to you also. We cross the Tugela by another drift, wait you here for the Inkosazana, and tell her how the Shouter died."

Then they turned and went. The wounded man watched them pass the door, and when the last of them had gone he used the assegai upon himself, and with his failing hand flung it feebly at Ishmael.

The dying Zulu's spear struck Ishmael, who had turned his head away, upon the cheek, just pricking it and causing the blood to flow, no more. Ishmael was still also, paralysed almost, or so he seemed, for even the pain of the cut did not make him move. He stared at the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Dove; he stared at the dead Zulu, and in his heart a voice cried: "You have murdered them. By now they are pleading to God for vengeance on you, Ishmael, the outcast. You will never dare to be alone again, for they will haunt you."

As he thought it the relaxed hand of the old clergyman who had fallen in a sitting posture on the bed,

slipped from his wounded head which he had clasped just before he died, and for a moment seemed to point at him. He shivered, but still he could not stir. How dreadful and solemn was that face! And those eyes, how they searched out the black record of his heart! The quiet rays of the afternoon sun suddenly flowed in through the window place and illumined the awful, accusing face till it shone like that of a saint in glory. A drop of blood from the cut upon his cheek splashed on to the floor, and the noise of it struck on his strained nerves loud as a pistol-shot. Blood, his own blood wherewith he must pay for that which he had shed. The sight and the thought seemed to break the spell. With an oath he bounded out of the room like a frightened wolf, those dead staring at him as he went, and rushed from the house that held them.

Beyond its walls Ishmael paused. The Zulus had fled in one direction, and the inhabitants of Ramah in another; there was no one to be seen. His eye fell upon the dense mass of bush above the station, and he remembered the message that he had sent to his own people to meet him there. Perhaps they had already arrived. He would go to see, he who was in such sore need of human company. As he went his numbed faculties returned to him, and in the open light of day some of his terror passed. He began to think again. What was done was done; he could not bring the dead back to life. He was not really to blame, and after all, things had worked out well for him. Save for this white man, Dario, Rachel was now alone in the world, and dead people did not speak, there was no one to tell her of his share in the tragedy. Why should she not turn to him who had no one else to whom she could go? The white man, if he were still with her, could be got rid of somehow; very likely he would run away, and they two would be left quite alone. At any rate it was for her sake that

he had entered on this black road of sin, and what did one step more matter, the step that led him to his reward? Of course it might lead him somewhere else. Rachel was a woman to be feared, and the Zulus were to be feared, and other things to which he could give no shape or name, but that he felt pressing round him, were still more to be feared. Perhaps he would do best to fly, far into the interior, or by ship to some other land where none would know him and his black story. What! Fly companioned by those ghosts, and leave Rachel, the woman for whom he burned, with this Dario, whom the Zulus said she loved, and with whom her mother, just before her end, had declared that she would be safe? Never. She was his; he had bought her with blood, and he would have the due the devil owed him.

He was in the bush now, and a voice called him, that of his head man.

"Come out, you dog," he said, searching the dense foliage with his eyes, and the man appeared, saluting him humbly.

"We received your message and we have come, Inkoos. We are but just arrived. What has chanced here that the town is so still?"

"The Zulus have been and gone. They have killed the white Teacher and his wife, though I thought to save them—look at my wound. Also the people are fled."

"Ah!" replied the head man, "that was an ill deed, for he was holy, and a great prophet, and doubtless his spirit is strong to revenge. Well for you is it, Master, that you had no hand in the deed, as at first I feared might be the case, for know that last night a strange dog climbed on to your hut and howled there and would not be driven away, nor could we kill it with spears, so we think it was a ghost. All your wives thought that evil had drawn near to you."

Ishmael struck him across the mouth, exclaiming:

"Be silent, you accursed wizard, or you shall howl louder than your ghost-dog."

"I meant no harm," answered the man humbly, but with a curious gleam in his eye. "What are your commands, Chief?"

"That we watch here. I think that the daughter of the Shouter, she who is called Inkosazana-y-Zoola, is coming, and she may need help. Have you brought thirty men with you as I bade you through my messengers?"

"Aye, Ibubesi, they are all hidden in the bush. I go to summon them, though I think that the mighty Inkosazana, who can command all the Zulu impis and all the spirits of the dead, will need little help from us."

CHAPTER XV

RACHEL COMES HOME

As Rachel had travelled up from the Tugela to the Great Place, so she travelled back from the Great Place to the Tugela in state and dignity such as became a thing divine, perhaps the first white woman, moreover, who had ever entered Zululand. All day she rode alone, Tamboosa leading the white ox before her and Richard following behind, while in front and to the rear marched the serried ranks of the impi, her escort. At night, as before, she slept alone in the empty kraals provided for her, attended by the best-born maidens, Richard being lodged in some hut without the fence.

So at length, about noon one day, they reached the banks of the Tugela, not many hours after Ishmael had crossed it, and camped there. Now, after she had eaten, Rachel sent for Richard, with whom she had found but few opportunities to talk during that journey. He came and stood before her, as all must do, and she addressed him in English while the spies and captains watched him sullenly, for they were angry at this use of a foreign tongue which they could not understand. Preserving a cold and distant air, she asked him of his health, and how he had fared.

"Well enough," he answered. "And now, what are your plans? The river is in flood, you will find it difficult to cross. Still it can be done, for I hear that the white man, Ishmael, of whom you told me,

forded it this morning with a company of armed men."

Aware of the eyes that watched her, with an effort Rachel showed no surprise.

"How is that?" she asked. "I thought the man fled from Zululand many days ago. Why then does he leave the country with soldiers?"

"I can't tell you, Rachel. There is something queer about the business. When I inquire, everyone shrugs his shoulders. They say that the King knows his own business. If I were you I would ask no questions, for you will learn nothing, and if you do not ask they will think that you know all."

"I understand," she said. "But, Richard, I must cross the river to-day. You and I must cross it alone and reach Ramah to-night. Richard, something weighs upon my heart; I am terribly afraid."

"How will you manage it?" he asked, ignoring the rest.

"I can't tell you yet, Richard, but keep my horse and yours saddled there where you are encamped," and she nodded towards a hut about fifty yards away. "I think that I shall come to you presently. Now go."

So he saluted her and went.

Presently Rachel sent for Tamboosa and the captains, and asked the state of the river which was out of sight about half a mile from them. They replied that it was "very angry"; none could think of attempting its passage, as much water was coming down.

"Is it so?" she said indifferently. "Well, I must look," and with slow steps she walked towards the hut where she knew the horses were, followed by Tamboosa and the captains.

Reaching it, she saw them standing saddled on its further side, and by them Richard, seated on the ground smoking. As she came he rose and saluted her, but, taking no heed of him, she went to her grey

mare, and, placing her foot in the stirrup, sprang to the saddle, motioning to him to do likewise.

"Whither goest thou, Inkosazana?" asked Tamboosa anxiously.

"To throw a charm on the waters," she answered, "so that they may run down and I can cross them to-morrow. Come, Dario, and come Tamboosa, but let the rest stay behind, since common eyes must not look upon my magic, and he who dares to look shall be struck with blindness."

The captains hesitated, and turning on them fiercely, she commanded them to obey her word lest some evil should befall them.

Then they fell back and she rode towards the Tugela, followed by Richard on horseback and Tamboosa on foot. Arrived at that spot upon the bank where she had received the salutation of the regiment when she entered Zululand, Rachel saw at once that although the great river was full it could easily be forded on horseback. Calling Richard to her, she said:

"We must go, and now, while there is no one to stop us but Tamboosa. Do not hurt him unless he tries to spear you, for he has been kind to me."

Then she addressed Tamboosa, saying:

"I have spoken to the waters and they will not harm me. The hour has come when I must leave my people for a while, and go forward alone with my white servant, Dario. These are my commands, that none should dare to follow me save only yourself, Tamboosa, who can bring on the white ox with its load so soon as the water has run down and deliver them to me at Ramah. Do you hear me?"

"I hear, Inkosazana," answered the old induna, "and thy words split my heart."

"Yet you will obey them, Tamboosa."

"Yes, I will obey them who know what would befall me otherwise, and that it is the King's will that none should dare to thwart thee, even if they could.

Yet I think that very soon thou wilt return to thy children. Therefore, why not abide with us until to-morrow, when the waters will be low?"

"Tamboosa," said Rachel, leaning forward and looking him in the eyes, "why did Ibubesi cross this river with soldiers but a few hours ago—Ibubesi, who fled from the Great Place when the moon was young that now is full? Look, there goes their spoor in the mud."

"I know not," he answered, looking down. "Inkosazana, to-morrow I will bring on the white ox to Ramah, and I will bring it alone."

"So be it, Tamboosa, but if by chance you should not find me, ask where Ibubesi is, and if need be, seek for me with an impi, Tamboosa—for me and for this white man, Dario," and again she bent forward and looked at him.

"I know not what thou meanest, Inkosazana," he replied. "But of this be sure, that if I cannot find thee, then I will seek for thee, if need be with every spear in Zululand at my back."

"Farewell, then, Tamboosa, and to the regiment farewell also. Say to the captains that it is my will that they should return to the Great Place, bearing my greetings to the King and those of the white lord, Dario. Look for me to-morrow at Ramah."

Then, followed by Richard, she rode her horse past him into the lip of the water. As she went Tamboosa drew himself up and gave her the Bayète, the royal salute.

Although it was red with earth and flecked with foam and the roar of it was loud as it sped towards the sea, the river did not prove very difficult to ford. But once, indeed, were the horses swept off their feet and forced to swim, and then but for a few paces, after which they regained them and plunged to the further bank without accident.

"Free at last, Rachel, with our lives before us

and nothing more to fear," called Richard in his cheery voice, as he forced his horse alongside of hers. Then suddenly he caught sight of her face and saw that it was white and drawn as though with pain; also that she leaned forward on her saddle, clasping its pommel as though she were about to faint.

"What is it?" he exclaimed in alarm. "Did the flood frighten you, Rachel—are you ill?"

For a few moments she made no answer, then straightened herself with a sigh and said in a low voice:

"Richard, I have been so long among those Zulus playing the part of a spirit that I begin to think I am one, or that their magic has got hold of me. I tell you that in the roar of the water I heard voices—the voices of my father and mother calling me and speaking of you—and, Richard, they seemed to be in great fear and pain. For a minute or more I heard them, then a dreadful cold wind blew on me—not this wind, it seemed to come from above—and everything passed away, leaving my mind numb and empty so that I do not remember how we came out of the river. Don't laugh at me, Richard; it is so. The Kaffirs are right; I have some power of the sort. Remember how I saw you travelling towards me in the pool."

"Why should I laugh at you, dearest?" he asked anxiously, for something of this uncanny fear passed from her mind into his, with which it was in tune. "Indeed, I don't laugh who know that you are not quite like other women. But, Rachel, the strain of those two months has worn you out, and now the reaction is too much. Perhaps it is nothing."

"Perhaps," she answered sadly, "I hope so. Richard, what is the time?"

"About a quarter to six, to judge by the sun," he answered.

"Then we shall not be able to reach Ramah before dark."

"No, Rachel, but there is a good moon."

"Yes, there is a good moon; I wonder what it will show us," and she shivered.

Then they pressed their horses to a canter and rode on, speaking little, for the fount of words seemed to be frozen in them, although Richard recollected with a curious sense of wonder how he had looked forward to this opportunity of long, unfettered talk with Rachel and how much he had to tell her. Over hill and valley, through bush and stream they rode, till at last with the short twilight they reached the plain that ran to Ramah. Then came the dark in which they must ride slowly, till presently the round edge of the moon pushed itself up above the shoulder of a hill and there was light again—pure, peaceful light that turned the veld to silver and shone whitely on the pale face of Rachel.

Ramah was before them. They had met no living thing save some wild game trekking to the water, and heard no sound save the distant roar of some beast of prey. Ramah was before them. The moon shone on the roofs of the Mission-house and the little church and the clusters of Kaffir huts beyond. But, oh! it was silent: no cattle lowed, no child cried, nor did the bell of the church ring for evening prayer as at this hour it should have done. Also no lamp showed in the windows of the Mission-house and no smoke rose from the cooking fires of the kraals.

"Where are all the people, Richard?" whispered Rachel. "There is the place unharmed, but where are the people?"

But Richard could only shake his head: the terror of something dreadful had got hold of him also, and he knew not what to say.

Now they had come to the wall of the Mission-house and sprang from their horses which they left loose. As they advanced side by side towards the open gate, something leapt from the stoep and rushed

through it. It was a striped hyena; they could see the hair bristle on its back as it passed them with a whining growl. Hand in hand they ran to the house across the little garden patch—Rachel, led by some instinct, guiding her companion straight to her parents' room whereof the windows, that opened like doors, stood wide as the gate had done.

One more moment and they were there; another, and the moonlight showed them all.

For a long while—to Richard it seemed hours—Rachel said nothing; only stood still like the statue of a woman, staring at those cold faces that looked back at her through the unearthly moonlight. Indeed, it was Richard who spoke first, feeling that if he did not this dreadful silence would choke him or cause him to faint.

"The Zulus have murdered them," he said hoarsely, glancing at the dead Kaffir on the floor.

"No," she answered in a cold, small voice; "Ishmael, Ishmael!" and she pointed to something that lay at his feet.

Richard stooped and picked it up. It was a fly wisp made of the tip of an elephant's tail shrunk on to a handle of rhinoceros horn which the man had let fall when the Zulu's spear struck him.

"I know it," she went on; "he always carried it. He is the real murderer. The Zulus would not have dared," and she choked and was silent.

"Let me think," said Richard confusedly. "There is something in my mind. What is it? Oh! I know. If you are right that devil has not done this for nothing. He is somewhere near; he wants to take you"; and he ground his teeth at the thought, then added: "Rachel, we must get out of this and ride for Durban, at once—at once; the white people will protect you there."

"Who will bury my father and mother?" she asked in the same cold voice.

"I do not know, it does not matter, the living are more than the dead. I can return and see to it afterwards."

"You are right," she answered. Then she knelt down by the bed and lifting her beautiful, agonised face, put up some silent prayer. Next she rose and kissed first her father, then her mother, kissed their dead brows in a last farewell and turned to go. As she went her eye fell upon the assegai that lay near to the dead Zulu. Stooping down, she took it and with it in her hand passed on to the stoep. Here her strength seemed to fail her, for she reeled against the wall, then with an effort flung herself into Richard's arms, moaning:

"Only you left, Richard, only you. Oh! if you were taken from me also, what would become of me?"

A moment later she became aware that the stoep was swarming with men who seemed to arise out of the shadows. A voice said in the Kaffir tongue:

"Seize that white fellow and bind him."

Instantly, before he could do anything, before he could even turn, Richard was torn from her, struggling furiously, and thrown to the ground. Rachel sprang to the wall and stood with her back to it, raising the spear she held. It flashed into her mind that these were Zulus, and of Zulus she was not afraid.

"What dogs are these," she cried, "that dare to lift a hand against the Inkosazana and her servant?"

The black men about her swayed and murmured, then made way for a man who walked up the steps of the stoep. The moonlight fell upon him and she saw that it was Ishmael.

"Rachel," he said, taking off his hat politely, "these are my people. We saw that white scoundrel assault you, and of course seized him at once. As you know a dreadful thing has happened here. This afternoon the Zulus killed your father and mother, or rather they killed your father, and your mother,

who was ill, died of the shock, because they refused to go to Zululand whither Dingaan had ordered that they should be taken. So seeing that you were travelling here I came to rescue you, lest you should fall into their hands, and," he added lamely, "you know the rest."

Ishmael had spoken in English, but Rachel answered him in Zulu.

"I know all, Night-prowler," she cried aloud. "I know that my father and mother were killed by your order, and in your presence; their spirits told me so but now, and for that crime I sentence you to death!" and she pointed at him with the spear. "Heaven above and earth beneath," she went on, "bear witness that I sentence this man to death. People of the Zulus, hear me in your kraals far away. Hear me, Dingaan, sitting in your Great Place. Hear me, every captain and induna, hear the voice of your Inkosazana: I sentence this man to death, since because of him there is blood between me and my people, the blood of my father and my mother. Now, Night-prowler, do your worst before you die, but know this, you his servants, that if I am harmed, or if this white man, the chief Dario, is harmed, then you shall die also, every one of you. What is your will, Night-prowler?"

"I will tell you that at Mafooti," answered Ishmael, trying to look bold. "I am not afraid of you like those Zulu savages, and Dingaan is a long way off. Will you come quietly? I hope so, for I don't want to hurt you or put you to shame, but you've got to come, and this Dario, too. If you make any trouble, I will have him killed at once. Understand, Rachel, that if you don't come, he shall be killed at once. My people may be afraid of you, but they won't mind cutting *his* throat," he added significantly.

"Never mind about me," said Richard in a choked voice from the ground where he was pinned down by

the Kaffirs. "Do what you think best for yourself, Rachel."

Now Rachel, whose wits were made keen by doubt and anguish, looked at the faces of the natives about her, and even in that dim moonlight read them like a book, as she could always do. She saw that they were afraid of her, and that if she commanded them, they would let her go free, whatever their master might say or do. But she saw also that Ishmael spoke truth when he declared that they had no such dread of Richard, and might even believe that he was doing her some violence. If she escaped therefore it would be at the cost of Richard's life. Instantly in her bold fashion she made up her mind. It was borne in upon her that she had declared the truth; that Ishmael was doomed, that he had no power to work her any hurt, however sore her case might seem. Since Richard's life hung on it she would go with him.

"Servants of Ibubesi," she said, "lift the white chief Dario to his feet, and listen to my words."

They obeyed her at once, without even waiting for their master to speak, only holding Richard by the arms.

"I go with you to the kraal Mafooti, not because I must, but that a doom which is decreed may be accomplished, and with me go the white chief Dario and the spirits of my dead. Me you cannot harm, but remember what I have told you, that if you harm him, or suffer him to be harmed," and she pointed to Richard, "my people, the Zulus, will kill you, every one, and send you to bear company with Ibubesi in the world of ghosts. Let us ride hence."

Now the most of the men went into the garden followed by Ishmael, and taking Richard with them, but a few remained to watch her. From this garden presently arose a sound of great quarrelling. Rachel was too far off to understand what was said, but from

the sounds she judged that Ishmael was giving orders to his people which they refused to obey, for she could hear him cursing them furiously. Presently she heard something else—the loud report of a gun followed by groans. Then a Kaffir ran up to them and whispered something to those who surrounded her ; it was that head man whom Ishmael had struck on the mouth in the bush when he told him that a dog had howled upon his hut, and his face was very frightened.

Rachel leaned against the wall and looked at him, for she could not speak, she who thought that Richard had been murdered.

" Have no fear, Inkosazana," said the man, answering the question in her eyes. " Ibubesi has killed one of us because we do not like this business and would clean it off our hands, that is all. The chief Dario is safe, and I swear to thee that no harm shall come to him from us. We will care for him and protect him to the death, and if we lead him away a prisoner it is because we must, since otherwise Ibubesi will kill us all. Therefore be merciful to us when the spear of thy power is lifted."

Before Rachel could answer Ishmael's voice was heard asking why they did not bring the Inkosazana as the horses were ready.

" I pray thee come, Zoola," said the man hurriedly, " or he will shoot more of us."

So Rachel walked down the steps of the stoep in front of them, holding her head high, leaving behind her the house of Ramah and its dead. At the gate of the garden stood the horses on one of which, his own, Richard was already mounted, his arms bound, his feet made fast beneath it with a hide rope. Her path lay past him, and as she went by he said in a voice that was choking with rage :

" I am helpless, I cannot save you, but our hour will come."

" Yes, Richard," she answered quietly, " our hour

will come when his has gone," and with the spear in her hand once more she pointed at Ishmael, who stood by watching them sullenly. Then she mounted her horse—how she could never remember—and they were separated.

After this she seemed to hear Ishmael talking to her, arguing, explaining, but she made no answer to his words. Her mind was a blank, and all she knew was that they were riding on for hours. Her tired horse stumbled up a pass and down its further side. Then she heard dogs bark and saw lights. The horse stopped and she slid from it, and as she was too exhausted to walk, was supported or carried into a hut, as she thought by women who seemed very much afraid of touching her, after which she seemed to sink into blackness.

Rachel woke from her stupor to find herself lying on a bed in a great Kaffir hut that was furnished like a European room, for in it were chairs and a table, also rough window places closed with reed mats that took the place of glass. Through the smoke-hole at the top of the hut struck a straight ray of sunlight, by which she judged that it must be about midday. She began to think, till by degrees everything came back to her, and in that hour she nearly died of horror and of grief. Indeed she was minded to die. There at her side lay a means of death—the assegai which she had found by the body of the Zulu in Ramah, and none had taken from her. She lifted it and felt its edge, then laid it down again. Into the darkness of her despair some comfort seemed to creep. She was sure that Richard lived, and if she died, he would die also. While he lived, why should she die ? Moreover, it would be a crime which she should only dare when all hope had gone and she stood face to face with shame.

Thrusting aside these thoughts she rose. On the

table stood curdled milk and other food of which she forced herself to eat, that her strength might return to her, for she knew that she would need it all. Then she washed and dressed herself, for in a corner of the hut was water in wooden bowls, and even a comb and other things, that apparently had been set there for her to use. This done, she went to the door, which was made like that of a house, and finding that it was not secured, opened it and looked out. Beyond was a piece of ground floored with the soil taken from ant-heaps, and polished black after the native fashion. This space was surrounded by a high stone wall, and had at the end of it another very strong door. In its centre grew a large, shady tree under which was placed a bench. Taking the assegai with her she went to the door in the high wall and found that it was barred on the further side. Then she returned and sat down on the bench under the tree.

It seemed that she had been observed, for a little while afterwards bolts were shot back, the door in the wall opened, and Ishmael entered, closing it behind him. She looked at the man, and at the sight of his handsome, furtive face, his dark, guilt-laden eyes, her gorge rose. She was alone in this secret place with the murderer of her father and her mother, who sought her love. Yet, strangely enough, her heart was filled not with fear, but with contempt and icy anger. She did not shrink away from him as he came towards her in his gaudy clothes, with an assumed air of insolent confidence, but sat pale and proud, as she had sat at Umgugundhlovu, when the Zulus brought their causes before her for judgment.

He advanced into the shadow of the tree, took off his hat with a flourish and bowed. Then as she made no answer to these salutations, but only searched him with her grey eyes, he began to speak in jerky sentences.

"I hope you have slept well, Rachel; I am glad

to see you looking so fresh. I was afraid that you would be over-tired after your long day. You rode many miles. Of course what you found at Ramah must have been a great shock to you. I want to explain to you quietly that I am not in the least to blame about that terrible business. It was those accursed Zulus who exceeded their orders."

So he went on, pausing between each remark for an answer, but no answer came. At length he stopped, confused, and Rachel, lifting the assegai, examined its blade, and asked him suddenly :

" Whose blood is on this spear ? Yours ? "

" A little of it, perhaps," he answered. " That fool of a Kaffir flourished it about after your father shot him and cut me with it accidentally," and he pointed to the wound on his face.

Rachel bent down and began to rub the blade against the foot of the bench as though to clean it. He did not know what she meant by this act, yet it frightened him.

" What are you doing ? " he asked.

She paused in her task and said, looking up at him :

" I do not wish that your blood should defile mine even in death," and went on with her cleansing of the spear.

He watched her for a little while, then broke out :

" Curse it all ! I don't understand you. What do you mean ? "

" Ask the Zulus," she answered. " They understand me, and they will tell you. Or if there is no time, ask my father and mother—afterwards."

Ishmael paled visibly, then recovered himself with an effort and said :

" Let us finish with all this witch-doctor nonsense, and come to business. I had nothing to do with the death of your parents, indeed, I was wounded in trying to protect them——"

"Then why do I see both of them behind you with such accusing eyes?" she asked quietly.

He started, turned his head and stared about him.

"You won't frighten me like that," he went on. "I am not a silly Kaffir, so give it up. Look here, Rachel, you know I have loved you for a long while, and though you treat me so badly I love you more than ever now. Will you marry me?"

"I told you last night that you would be dead in a few days. Do not waste your time in talking of marriage. Sit in the dust and repent your sins before you go down into the dust."

"All right, Rachel, I know you are a good prophet——"

"Noie, too, is a good prophet," she broke in reflectively. "You used the Zulus to kill *her* father and mother also, did you not? Do you remember a message that she gave you from Seyapi one evening, down by the sea, before you kidnapped her to be a bait to trap me in Zululand?"

"Remember!" he answered, scowling. "Am I likely to forget her devilries? If you are the witch, she is the familiar, the black *ehlosé* (spirit) who whispers in your ears. Had she not gone I should never have caught you."

"But she will come back—although I fear not in time to bid you farewell."

"You tell me that I shall soon be dead," he exclaimed, ignoring this talk of Noie. "Well, I am not frightened. I don't believe you know anything about it, but if you are right the more reason I should live while I can. According to you, Rachel, we have no time to waste in a long engagement. When is it to be?"

"Never!" she answered contemptuously, "in this or any other world. Never! Why, you are hateful to me; when I see you, I shiver as though a snake crawled across my foot, and when I look at your hands

they are red with blood, the blood of my parents and of Noie's parents, and of many others. I will not be touched by a hand that is red with blood. That is my answer."

He looked at her a while, then said:

"You seem to forget that I am only asking for what I can take. No one can see you or hear you here, except my women. You are in my power at last, Rachel Dove."

These words which Ishmael intended should frighten her, as they might well have done, produced as it chanced, a quite different effect. Rachel broke into a scornful laugh.

"Look," she said, pointing to an eagle that circled so high in the blue heavens above them that it seemed no larger than a hawk, "that bird is more in your power, and nearer to you than I am. Before you laid a finger on me I would find a dozen means of death, but that I tell you again you will never live to do."

For a while Ishmael was silent, weighing her words in his mind. Apparently he could find no answer to them, for when he spoke again it was of another matter.

"You say that you hate me, Rachel. If so, it is because of that accursed fellow, Darrien—whom you don't hate. Well, he, at any rate, is in my power. Now look here. You've got to make your choice. Either you stop all this nonsense and become my wife, or—your friend Darrien dies. Do you hear me?"

Rachel made no answer. Now for the first time she was really frightened, and feared lest her speech should show it.

"You have been through a lot," he went on, slowly; "you are tired out, and don't know what you say, and you believe that I killed the old people, which I didn't, and, of course, that has set you against me. Now, I don't want to be rough, or to

hurry you, especially as I have plenty of things to see about before we are married. So I give you three days. If you don't change your mind at the end of them, the young man dies, that's all, and afterwards we will see whether or no you are in my power. Oh! you needn't stare. I've gone too far to turn back, and I don't mind a few extra risks. Meanwhile make yourself easy, dear Richard shall be well looked after, and I won't bother you with any more love-making. That can wait."

Rachel rose from her seat and pointed with the spear to the door in the wall.

"Go," she said.

"All right, I am going, Rachel. Good-bye till this time three days. I hope my women will make you as comfortable as possible in this rough place. Ask them for anything you want. Good-bye, Rachel," and he went, bolting the wall door behind him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE THREE DAYS

He was gone, his presence had ceased to poison the air, and, the long strain over, Rachel gave a gasp of relief. Then she sat down upon the bench and began to think. Her position, and that of Richard, was desperate ; it seemed scarcely possible that they could escape with their lives, for if he died, she would die also—as to that she was quite determined. But at least they had three days, and who could say what would happen in three days ? For instance, they might escape somehow, the Providence in which she believed might intervene, or the Zulus might come to seek her, if they only knew where she was gone. Oh ! why had she not brought a guard of them with her to Ramah ? At least they would never have insulted her, and Ishmael's shrift would have been short.

She wondered why he had given her three days. A reason suggested itself to her mind. Perhaps he believed what she had told him—that she was as safe from him as the eagle in the air—and was sure that the only way to snare her was by using Richard as a lure, in other words, by threatening to murder him. It is true that he could have brought the matter to a head at once, but then, if she remained obdurate, he must carry out his threat, and this, she believed, he was afraid to do unless it was absolutely forced upon him. Doubtless he had reflected that in three days she might weaken and give way.

Whilst Rachel brooded thus the door in the wall

opened, and through it came three women, who saluted her respectfully, and announced that they were sent to clean the hut, and attend upon her. Rachel took stock of them carefully. Two of them were young, ordinary, good-looking Kaffirs, but the third was between thirty and forty, and no longer attractive, having become old early, as natives do. Moreover, her face was sad and sympathetic. Rachel asked her her name. She answered that it was Mami, and that they were all the wives of Ibubesi.

The women went about their duties in the hut in silence, and a while afterwards announced that all was made clean, and that they would return presently with food. Rachel answered that it was not necessary that three of them should be put to so much trouble. It would be enough if Mami came. She desired to be waited on by Mami alone, her sisters need not come any more.

They all three saluted again, and said that she should be obeyed ; the two younger ones with alacrity. To Rachel it was evident that these women were much afraid of her. Her reputation had reached them, and they shrank from this task of attending on the mighty Inkosazana of the Zulus in her cage, not knowing what evil it might bring upon them.

An hour later the door was unbolted, and Mami reappeared with the food that had been very carefully cooked. Rachel ate of it, for she was determined to grow strong again, she who might need all her strength, and while she ate talked to Mami, who squatted on the ground before her. Soon she drew her story from her. The woman was Ishmael's first Kaffir wife, but he had never cared for her, and against all law and custom she was discarded, and made a slave. Even some of her cattle had been taken from her and given to other wives. So her heart was bitter against Ishmael, and she said that although once she was proud to be the wife of a

white man, now she wished that she had never seen his face.

Here, then, was material ready to Rachel's hand, but she did not press the matter too far at this time. Only she said that she wished Mami to stay with her after the evening meal, and to sleep in her hut, as she was not accustomed to be alone at night. Mami replied that she would do so gladly if Ibubesi allowed it, although she was not worthy of such honour.

As it happened, Ishmael did allow it, for he thought that he could trust this old drudge, and told her to act as a spy upon Rachel, and report to him all that she said or did. Very soon Rachel found this out and warned her against obeying him, since if she did so it would come to her knowledge, and then great evil would fall on one who betrayed the words of the Inkosazana.

Mami answered that she knew it, and that Rachel need not be afraid. Any tale would do for Ishmael, whom she hated. Then, saying little herself, Rachel encouraged her to talk, which Mami did freely. So she heard some news. She learned, for instance, that the whole town of Mafooti, whereof Ibubesi was chief, which counted some sixty or seventy heads of families, was much disturbed by the events of the last few days. They did not like the Inkosazana being brought there, thinking that where she went the Zulus would follow, and as they were of Zulu blood themselves, they knew what that meant. They were alarmed at the deaths of the white sky-doctor, who was called Shouter, and his wife, with which Ibubesi had something to do, for they feared lest they should be held responsible for their blood. They objected to the imprisonment of the white chief, Dario, among them, because "he had hurt no one, and was under the mantle of the Inkosazana, who was a spirit, not a woman," and who had warned them that if any harm came to her or to him, death would be

their reward. They were angry, also, because Ibubesi had killed one of them in some quarrel about the chief Dario at Ramah. Still, they were so much afraid of Ibubesi, who was a great tyrant, that they did not dare to interfere with him and his plans, lest they should lose their cattle, or, perhaps, their lives. So they did not know what to do. As for Ibubesi himself, he was actively engaged in strengthening the fortifications of the place; even the old people and the children were being forced to carry stones to the walls, from which it was evident that he feared some attack.

When Rachel had gathered this and much other information concerning Ishmael's past and habits, she asked Mami if she could convey a message from her to Richard. The woman answered that she would try on the following morning. So Rachel told her to say that she was safe and well, but that he must watch his footsteps, as both of them were in great danger. More she did not dare to say, fearing lest Mami should betray her, or be beaten till she confessed everything. Then, as there was nothing more to be done, Rachel lay down and slept as best she could.

The next day passed in much the same fashion as the first had done. For the most of it Rachel sat under the tree in the walled yard, companioned only by her terrible thoughts and fears. Nobody came near her, and nothing happened. In the morning Mami went out, and returning at the dinner hour, told Rachel that she had seen Ishmael, who had questioned her closely as to what the Inkosazana had done and said, to which she replied that she had only eaten and slept, and invoked the spirits on her knees. As for wo ds, none had passed her lips. She had not been able to get near the huts where Dario was in prison, as Ishmael was watching her. For the rest, the work of fortification went on without cease, even Ishmael's own wives being employed thereon.

In the afternoon Mami went out again and did not return till night, when she had much to tell. To begin with, while the sentry was dozing, being wearied with carrying stones to the wall, she had managed to approach the fence of the hut where Richard was confined. She said that he was walking up and down inside the fence with his hands tied, and she had spoken to him through a crack in the reeds, and given him Rachel's message. He listened eagerly, and bade her tell the Inkosazana that he thanked her for her words; that he, too, was strong and well, though much troubled in mind, but the future was in the hands of the Heavens, and that she must keep a high heart. Just then the sentry woke up, so Mami could not wait to hear any more.

That evening, however, a lad who had been sent out of the town to drive in some cattle, had returned with the tidings which she, Mami, heard him deliver to Ibubesi with her own ears.

He said that whilst he was collecting the oxen, a ringed Zulu came upon him, who from his manner and bearing he took to be a great chief, although he was alone, and seemed to be tired with walking. The Zulu had asked him if it were true that the Inkosazana and the white chief Dario were in prison at Mafooti, and when he hesitated about replying, threatened him with his assegai, saying that he would cut out his heart unless he told the truth. Then being frightened, the lad said that it was true; that they had been brought thither from Ramah. The Zulu replied that he knew it, as he had just come from Ramah, where he had seen strange things, and spoken with a man of Ibubesi's, whom he found dying in the garden of the house. Then he had given him this message:

"Say to Ibubesi that I know all his wickedness, and that if the Inkosazana is harmed, or a drop of the blood of the white chief, Dario, is shed, I will destroy him and everything that lives in his town down to the

rats. Say to him also that he cannot escape, as already he is ringed in by the children of the Shouter, who have come back, and are watching him."

The lad had asked who it was that sent such a message, whereon he answered, "I am the Horn of the Black Bull; I am the Trunk of the Elephant; I am the Mouth of Dingaan."

Then straightway he turned and departed at a run towards Zululand. Moreover, Mami described the man in the words of the lad, and Rachel thought that he could be none other than Tamboosa, whom she had commanded to follow her with the white ox. Mami added that when he received this message Ibubesi seemed much disturbed, though to his people he declared that it was all nonsense, as Dingaan's Mouth would not come alone, or deliver the King's word to a boy. But the people thought otherwise, and murmured among themselves, fearing the terrible vengeance of Dingaan.

On the next day Mami went out again. At nightfall, when she returned, she told Rachel that she had not found it possible to approach the huts where Dario was, as the hole she made in the fence to speak with him had been discovered, and a stricter watch was kept over him. Ibubesi, she said, was in an ill humour, and working furiously to finish his fortifications, as he was now sure that the town was being watched, either by the Kaffirs of Ramah, or others. As for the people of Mafooti, they were grumbling very much, both on account of the heavy labour of working at the walls, and because they were in terror of being attacked and killed in payment for the evil deeds of their chief. Mami declared, indeed, that so great was their fear and discontent, that she thought they would desert the town in a body, were it not that they dreaded lest they should fall into the hands of the Kaffirs who were watching it. Rachel asked her whether they would not then take her and Dario and

deliver them up to the Zulus, or to the white people on the coast. Mami answered she thought they would be afraid to do this, as Ibubesi alone had guns, and would shoot plenty of them ; also if the Zulus found them with their Inkosazana they would kill them. She added that she had seen Ibubesi, who bade her tell the Inkosazana that he was coming for her answer on the morrow.

Rachel slept ill that night. The space of her reprieve had gone by, and next morning she must face the issue. For herself she did not so greatly care, for at the worst she had a refuge whither Ishmael could not follow her—the grave. After all she had endured it seemed to her that this must be a peaceful place ; moreover, in her case what Power could blame her ? But there was Richard to be thought of. If she refused Ishmael he swore that he would kill Richard. And yet how could she pay that price even to save her lover's life ? Perhaps he would not kill him after all ; perhaps he would be afraid of the vengeance of the Zulus, and was only trying to frighten her. Ah ! if only the Zulus would come—before it was too late ! It was scarcely to be hoped for. Tamboosa, if it were he who had spoken with the lad, would not have had time to return to Zululand and collect an impi, and when they did come, the deed might be done. If only these servants of Ibubesi would rise against him and kill him, or carry off Richard and herself ! Alas ! they feared the man too much, and she could not get at them to persuade them. There was nothing that she could do except pray. Richard and she must take their chance. Things must go as they were decreed.

If she could have seen Ishmael at this hour and read his thoughts, that sight and knowledge might have brought some comfort to her tortured heart. The man was seated in his hut alone, staring at the floor and pulling his long black beard with hands rough

from toiling at the walls. He was drinking also, stiff tots of rum and water, but the fiery liquor seemed to bring him no comfort. As he drank, he thought. He was determined to get possession of Rachel; that desire had become a madness with him. He could never abandon it while he lived. But *she* might not live. She had sworn that she would rather die than become his wife, and she was not a woman who broke her word. Also she hated him bitterly, and with good cause. There was only one way to work on her—through her love for this man, Richard Darrien; for that she did love him, he had little doubt. If it were choice between yielding and the death of Darrien, then perhaps she might give way. But there came the rub.

Dingaan had sworn to him that if he made Darrien's blood to flow, then he should be killed, and, like Rachel, Dingaan kept his oaths. Moreover, that Zulu who met the cattle herd had sworn it again in almost the same words. Therefore it would seem that if he wished to continue to breathe, Darrien's blood must not be made to flow. All the rest might be explained when the impi came, as it would do sooner or later, especially if he could show to them that the Inkosazana was his willing wife, but the murder of Darrien could never be explained. Well, the man might die, or seem to die, and then who could hold him responsible? Or if they did, if any of his people remained faithful to him, an attack might be beaten off. Brave as they were, the Zulus could not storm those walls on which he had spent so much labour, though now he almost wished that he had left the walls alone and settled the affair of Rachel and of Darrien first.

Ishmael poured out more rum and drank it, neat this time, as though to nerve himself for some undertaking. Then he went to the door of the hut and called, whereon presently a hideous old woman crept in and squatted down in the circle of

light thrown by the lamp. She was wrinkled and deformed, and her snake-skin moocha, with the inflated fish-bladder in her hair, showed that she was a witch-doctoress.

"Well, Mother," he said, "have you made the poison?"

"Yes, Ibubesi, yes. I have made it as I alone can do. Oh! it is a wonderful drug, worth many cows. How many did you say you would give me? Six?"

"No, three; but if it does what is wanted you shall have the other three as well. Tell me again, how does it work?"

"Thus, Ibubesi. Whoever drinks this medicine becomes like one dead—none can tell the difference, no, not a doctor even—and remains so for a long while—perhaps one day, perhaps two, perhaps even three. Then life returns, and by degrees strength, but not memory; for whole moons the memory is gone, and he who has drunk remains like a child that has everything to learn."

"You lie, Mother. I never heard of such a medicine."

"You never heard of it because none can make it save me, and I had its secret from my grandmother; also few can afford to pay me for it. Still, it has been used, and were I not afraid I could give you cases. Stay, I will show you. Call that beast," and she pointed to a dog that was asleep at the side of the hut. "Here is milk; I will show you."

Ishmael hesitated, for he was fond of this dog; then as he wished to test the stuff he called it. It came and sat down beside him, looking up in his face with faithful eyes. Then the old witch poured milk into a bowl, and in the milk mixed some white powder which she took out of a folded leaf, and offered it to the animal. The dog sniffed the milk, growled slightly, and refused it.

"The evil beast does not like me; he bit me the

other day," said the old doctoress. "Do you give it to him, Ibubesi; he will trust you."

So Ishmael patted the dog on the head, then offered it the milk, which it lapped up to the last drop.

"There, evil beast," said the woman, with a chuckle, "you won't bite me any more; you'll forget all about me for a long time. Look at him, Ibubesi, look at him."

As she spoke, the poor dog's coat began to stare; then it uttered a low howl, ran to Ishmael, tried to lick his hand, and rolled over, to all appearance quite dead.

"You have killed my dog, which I love, you hag!" he said angrily.

"Then why did you give medicine to what you love, Ibubesi? But have no fear, the evil beast has only taken a small dose; to-morrow morning it will awake, but it will not know you or anyone. Who is the medicine for, Ibubesi? The Lady Zoola? If so, it may not work on her, for she is mighty, and cannot be harmed."

"Fool! Do you think that I would play tricks with the Inkosazana?"

"No, you want to marry her, don't you? but it seems to me that she has no mind that way. Then it is for the man for whom she has a mind? Well, Ibubesi, you have promised the six cows, and you saved me once from being killed for witchcraft, so I will say something. Don't give it to the chief Dario."

"Why not, you old fool; will it kill him after all?"

"No, no; it will do what I said, no less and no more, in this quantity," and she handed him another powder wrapped in dry leaves; "but I have had bad dreams about you, Ibubesi, and they were mixed up with the Inkosazana and this white man Dario. I dreamed they brought your death upon you—a dreadful death. Ibubesi, be wise, set Dario free, and change your mind as to marrying the Inkosazana, who is not for you."

"How can I change my mind, Descendant of Wizards?" broke out Ishmael furiously. "Can a river penned between rocks change its course? Can it run backwards from the sea to the hill? This woman draws me as the sea draws the river; because of her my blood is afire. I had rather win her and die, than live rich and safe without her to old age. The more she hates and scorns me, the more I love her."

"I understand," said the doctoress, nodding her head till the bladder in her hair bobbed about like a float at which a fish is pulling. "I understand. I have seen people like this before—men and women too—when a bad spirit enters into them because of some crime they have committed. The Inkosazana, or those who guard her, have sent you this bad spirit, and, Ibubesi, you must run the road upon which it is appointed that you should travel; for joy or sorrow you must run that road. But when we meet in the world of ghosts, which I think will be soon, do not blame me, do not say that I did not warn you. Now it is all right about those cows, is it not? although I dare say the Zulus will milk them and not I, for to-night I seem to smell Zulus in the air," and she lifted her broad nose and sniffed like a hound. "I wish you could have left the Inkosazana alone, and that Dario too, for he is a part of her; in my dreams they seemed to be one. But you won't, you will walk your own path; so good-night, Ibubesi. The dog will wake again in the morning, but he will not know you. Good-night, Ibubesi—of course I understand that the cows will be young ones that have not had more than two calves. Mix the powder in milk, or water, or anything; it is without taste or colour. Good-night, Ibubesi," and without waiting for an answer the old wretch crept out of the hut.

When she was gone Ishmael cursed her aloud, then drank some more rum, which he seemed to need. The place was very lonely, and the sight of his dog, lying to

all appearance dead at his side, oppressed him. He patted its head and it did not move ; he lifted its paw and it fell down flabbily. The brute was as dead as anything could be. It occurred to him that before night came again he might look like that dog. His story might be told ; he might have left the earth in company of all the deeds that he had done thereon. He had imagination enough to know his sins, and they were an evil host to face. Old Dove and his wife, for instance—holy people who believed in God and Vengeance, and had never done any wrong, only striven for years and years to benefit others ; it would not be pleasant to meet them. Rachel had said that she saw them standing behind him, and he felt as though they were there at that moment. Look, one of them crossed between him and the lamp—there was the mark of the kerry on his head—and the woman followed; he could see her blue lips as she bent down to look at the dog. It was unbearable. He would go and talk to Rachel, and ask her if she had made up her mind. No, for if he broke in on her thus at night, he was sure that she would kill either herself or him with that spear she had taken from the dead Zulu, reddened with his own blood. He would keep faith with her and wait till the morrow. He would send for one of his wives. No, the thought of those women made him sick. He would go round the fortifications and beat any sentries whom he found asleep, or receive the reports of the spies. To stop in that hut in the company of a dog which seemed to be dead, and of imaginations that no rum could drown, was impossible.

* * * * *

Once more the morning came, and Rachel sat in the walled yard awaiting the dreadful hour of her trial, for it was the day and time that Ishmael had appointed for her answer. Until now Rachel had cherished hopes that something might happen :

that the people of Mafooti might intervene to save her and Richard; that the Zulus might appear, even that Ishmael might relent and let them go. But Mami had been out that morning and brought back tidings which dispelled these hopes. She had ventured to sound some of the leading men, and said that, like all the people, they were very sullen and alarmed, but declared, as she had expected, that they dare do nothing, for Ibubesi would kill them, and if they escaped him the Zulus would kill them because the Inkosazana was found in their possession. Of the Zulus themselves, scouts who had been out for miles, reported that they had seen no sign. It was clear also that Ishmael was as determined as ever, for he had sent her a message by Mami that he would wait upon her as he had promised, and bring the white man with him.

Then what should she say and what should she do? Rachel could think of no plan; she could only sit still and pray while the shadow of that awful hour crept ever nearer.

It had come; she heard voices without the wall, among them Ishmael's. Her heart stopped, then bounded like a live thing in her breast. He was commanding someone to "catch that dog and tie it up, for it was bewitched, and did not know him or anyone," then the sound of a dog being dragged away, whining feebly, and then the door opened. First Ishmael came in with an affectation of swaggering boldness, but looking like a man suffering from the effects of a long debauch. About his eyes were great black rings, and in them was a stare of sleeplessness. He carried a double-barrelled gun under his arm, but the hand with which he supported it shook visibly, and at every unusual sound he started. After him came Richard, his wrists bound together behind him, and on his legs hide shackles which only just allowed him to shuffle forward slowly. Moreover he was

guarded by four men who carried spears. Rachel glanced quickly at his face, and saw that it was pale and resolute; quite untouched by fear.

"Are you well?" she asked quietly, taking no note of Ishmael.

"Yes," he answered, "and you, Rachel?"

"Quite well bodily, Richard, but oh! my soul is sick."

Before he could reply Ishmael turned on him savagely, and bade him be silent, or it would be the worse for him. Then he took off his hat with his shaking hand, and bowed to Rachel.

"Rachel," he said, "I have kept my promise, and left you alone for three days, but time is up and now this gentleman and I have come to hear your decision, which is so important to both of us."

"What am I to decide?" she asked in a low voice, looking straight before her.

"Have you forgotten? Your memory must be very bad. Well, it is best to have no mistake, and no doubt our friend here would like to know exactly how things stand. You have to decide whether you will take me as your husband to-day of your own free will, or whether Mr. Richard Darrien shall suffer the punishment of death for having tried to kill his sentry and escape, a crime of which he has been guilty, and afterwards I should take you as my wife with, or without, your consent."

When Richard heard these words the veins in his forehead swelled with rage and horror till it seemed as though they would burst.

"You unutterable villain," he gasped, "you cowardly hound! Oh! if only my hands were free."

"Well, they ain't, Mr. Darrien, and it's no use your tugging at that buffalo hide, so hold your tongue, and let us hear the lady's answer," sneered Ishmael.

"Richard, Richard," said Rachel in a kind of

wail, "you have heard. It is a matter of your life. What am I to do?"

"Do?" he answered, in loud, firm tones, "do? How can you ask such a question? The matter is not one of my life, but of your—of your—oh! I cannot say it. Let this foul beast kill me, of course, and then, if you care enough, follow the same road. A few years sooner or later make little difference, and so we shall soon be together again."

She thought a moment, then said quietly:

"Yes, I care enough, and a hundred times more than that. Yes, that is the only way out. Listen, you Ishmael:—Richard Darrien, the man to whom I am sworn, and I, give you this answer. Murder him if you will, and bring God's everlasting vengeance on your head. He will not buy his life on such terms, and if I consented to them I should be false to him. Murder him as you murdered my father and mother, and when I know that he is dead I will go to join him and them."

"All right, Rachel," said Ishmael, whose face was white with fury, "I think I will take you at your word, and you can go to look for him down below, if you like, for if I am not to get you here, he shan't. Now then, say your prayers, Mr. Darrien," and stepping forward slowly he cocked the double-barrelled gun.

"Men of Mafooti," exclaimed Rachel in Zulu, "Ibubesi is about to do murder on one who like myself is under the mantle of Dingaan. If his blood should flow to-day or to-morrow, yours shall flow in payment, yours, and that of your wives and children, for the crime of the chief is the crime of the people."

At her words the four natives who had been watching this scene uneasily, although they could not understand the English talk, called out to Ishmael in remonstrance. His only answer was to lift the gun, and for an instant that seemed infinite Rachel waited to hear its explosion, and to see the grey-eyed, open-

faced man she loved, who stood there like a rock, fall a shattered corpse. Then one of the Kaffirs, bolder than the rest, struck up the barrels with his arm, and not too soon, for whether or no he had meant to pull the trigger, the rifle went off.

"Try the other barrel," said Richard sarcastically, as the smoke cleared away, "that shot was too high."

Perhaps Ishmael might have done so, for the man was beside himself, but the Kaffirs would have no more of it. They rushed between them, lifting their spears threateningly, and shouting that they would not allow the blood of the white lord and the curse of the Inkosazana to be brought upon their heads and those of their families. Rather than that they would bind him, Ibubesi, and give him over to the Zulus. Then whether or not he had really meant to kill Richard, Ishmael thought it politic to give way.

"So be it," he said to Rachel, "I am merciful, and both of you shall have another chance. I am going with this fellow, but the woman, Mami, shall come to you. If within three hours you send her to me with a message to say that you have changed your mind, he shall be spared. If not, before nightfall you shall see his body, and afterwards we will settle matters."

"Rachel, Rachel," cried Richard, "swear that you will send no such message."

Now the brute, Ishmael, rushed at him to strike him in the face. But Richard saw him coming, and bound though he was, put down his head and butted at him so fiercely, that being much the stronger man, he knocked him to the ground, where he lay breathless.

"Swear, Rachel, swear," he repeated, "or dead or living, I will never forgive you."

"I swear," she said, faintly.

Then he shuffled towards her. Bending down he kissed her on the face, and she kissed him back; no more words passed between them; this was their farewell. Two of the Kaffirs lifted Ishmael, and helped him from the yard, whilst the other two led away Richard, who made no resistance. At the gate he turned, and their eyes met for a moment. Then it closed behind him, and she was left alone again.

CHAPTER XVII

RACHEL LOSES HER SPIRIT

A LITTLE while later Mami entered and said that she had been sent by Ibubesi to serve the Inkosazana as a messenger, should she need one. Rachel, seated on the bench, motioned to her to go into the hut and bide there, and she obeyed.

Minute by minute the time ebbed away, and still Rachel sat motionless on the bench. Towards the end of the third hour someone unbolted and knocked at the door. Mami opened it and reported that Ibubesi stood without, and desired to know whether she had any word for him.

"None," answered Rachel, remembering her oath, and the door was barred again.

After this a great silence seemed to fall upon the place. The sky was grey with distant rain, and the air heavy, and whatever may have been the cause, no sound came from man or beast without. To Rachel's strained nerves it seemed as though the Angel of Death had spread his wings above the town. There she sat paralysed, wondering what evil thing was being worked upon her lover; wondering if she had done right to give him as a sacrifice to this savage in order to save herself from dreadful wrong—wondering, wondering till the powers of her mind seemed to die within her, leaving it grey and empty as the grey and empty sky above.

Night drew on and the setting sun, bursting through the envelope of cloud, filled earth and sky

with fire, and it came into Rachel's heart, she knew not whence, that fire was near, that soon it would swallow up all this place.

Look! the door was opening; it swung wide, and through it advanced eight Kaffirs, carrying something on a litter made of shields, something that was covered with a blanket of bark. They drew near to her with bent heads, and set down their burden at her feet. Then one of them lifted the blanket, revealing the body of Richard Darrien, and saying in an awed voice,

"Inkosazana, Ibubesi sends you this to look on to show you that he keeps his word. Later he will visit you himself."

Rachel knelt down by the litter of shields and looked at Richard's face. The stamp of death was on it. She felt his hand, it was turning cold; she felt his heart, it did not beat.

"Show me this dead lord's wounds," she said in an awful whisper, "that presently mine may be like to them."

"Inkosazana," said the spokesman, "he has no wound."

"How, then, did he die? Strange that he should die, and I not feel his spirit pass."

"Inkosazana, he was thirsty, and drank, then he died."

"So, so! he was slain by poison, and I have no poison. Mami, come forth and look on the white lord whom Ibubesi has murdered by poison."

The woman Mami, who had been sleeping in the hut, awoke and obeyed. She saw, and wailed aloud.

"Woe to Mafooti!" she cried, like one inspired, "and woe, woe to those that dwell therein, for now vengeance, red vengeance, shall fall on them from Heaven. The blood of the innocent is upon them, the curse of the Inkosazana is upon them, the spears of the Zulus are upon them. Slay the *silwana*, the

wild beast—Ibubesi, and fly, people of Mafooti, fly, fly with that dead thing. Leave it not here to bear witness against you. Carry it far away and heap a mountain on it. Bury it in a valley that no man can find; bury it in the black water, lest it should arise and bear witness against you. Leave it not here, but let the darkness cover it, and fly with it into the darkness, as I do," and turning she sped to the door and through it.

The light from the sunk sun went out smothered in the gathering thunder-clouds. Through the gloom the terrified bearers muttered to each other.

"Throw it down and away!" said one.

"Nay," answered another, "wisdom has come to Mami, her *ehlosé* has spoken to her. Take it with you, lest it should remain to bear witness against us."

"Remember what the Zulu swore," said a third, "that if harm came to this lord they would kill all, down to the rats. Take it away so that it may not be found. If you meet Ibubesi, spear him. If not, leave him the vengeance for his share."

Now, moved as though by a common impulse, the bearers cast back the blanket over the corpse, and lifting the litter, departed at a run. The door was shut and bolted behind them, and darkness fell upon the earth.

For a while Rachel stood still in the darkness.

"Now I am alone," she said in a quiet voice, yet to her ears the words seemed to be uttered with a roar of thunder that echoed through the firmament, and pierced upwards to the feet of God.

Then suddenly something snapped in her brain and she was changed. The horror left her, the terror left her, she felt very well and strong, so well that she laughed aloud, and again that laugh filled earth and heaven. Oh! she was hungry, and food stood on a table near by. She sprang to it and ate, ate heartily.

Then she drank, muttering to herself, " Richard drank before he died. Let me drink also and cease to be alone."

Her meal finished, she walked up and down the place singing a song that seemed to be caught up triumphantly by a million voices, the voices of all who had ever lived and died. Their awful music stunned her and she ceased. Look! Wild beasts wearing the face of Ibubesi were licking the clouds with their tongues of fire. It was curious, but in that high-walled place she could not see it well. Now from the top of the hut the view would be better. Yes, and Ishmael was coming to visit her. Well, they would meet for the last time on the top of the hut. She was not afraid of him, not at all; but it would be strange to see him scrambling up the hut, and they would talk there for a little while with their faces close together, till—ah! till what—? Till something strange happened, something unhappy for Ishmael. Oh! no, no, she would not kill herself, she would wait to see what it was that happened to Ishmael, that strange thing which she knew so well, and yet could not remember.

How easy this hut was to climb, a cat could not have run up with less trouble. Now she stood on the top of it, her spear in one hand, and holding with the other to the pole that was set there to scare away the lightning; stood for a long time watching the wild beasts licking the clouds with their red tongues.

The beasts grew weary of lapping up clouds. Their appetites were satisfied for a while, at any rate she saw their tongues no more. The air was very hot and heavy, and the darkness very dense, it seemed to press about her as though she were plunged in cream. Yet Rachel thought that she heard sounds through it, a sound of feet to the west and a sound of feet to the east.

Then she heard another sound, that of the door in the wall opening, and of a soft, tentative footfall, like

to the footfall of a questing wolf. She knew it at once, for now her senses were sharper than those of any savage ; it was the step of Ibubesi, the Night-prowler. She felt inclined to laugh ; it was so funny to think of herself standing there on the top of a hut while the Night-prowler slunk about below looking for her. But she refrained, remembering the dreadful noise when all the Heavens began to laugh in answer. So she was silent, for the Heavens do not reverberate silence, although she could hear her own thoughts passing through them, passing up one by one on their infinite journey.

Listen ! He was walking round and round the yard. He went to the bench beneath the tree and felt along it with his fingers to see if she were there. Now he was entering the hut and groping at the bedstead, and now he had kindled a light, for the rays of it shone faintly up through the smoke-hole. Discovering nothing he came out again, leaving the lamp burning within, and called her softly.

" Rachel," he said, " Rachel, where are you ? "

There was no answer, and he began to talk to himself.

" Has she got away ? " he muttered. " Some of them have gone, I know, the accursed, cowardly fools. No, it is not possible, the watch was too good, unless she is really a spirit, and has melted, as spirits do. I hope not, for if so she will haunt me, and I want her company in the flesh, not in the spirit. I ought to have it too, for it has cost me pretty dear. She must have bewitched me, or why should I have risked everything for her, just one white woman who hates the sight of me ? The devil is at the back of it. This was his road from the first."

So he went on until Rachel could bear it no more, the thing was too absurd.

" Yes, yes," she said from the top of the hut, " his road from the first, and it ends not far away, at the red gates of Hell, Night-prowler."

The man below gasped, and fell against the fence.

"Whose voice is that? Where are you?" he asked of the air.

Then as there was no answer, he added: "It sounded like Rachel, but it spoke above me. I suppose that she has killed herself. I thought she might, but better that she should be dead than belong to that fellow. Only then why does she speak?"

He started to feel his way towards the hut, perhaps to fetch the lamp, when suddenly the skies behind were illumined in a blaze of light, a broad slow blaze that endured for several seconds. By it the eyes of Rachel, made quick with madness, saw many things. From her perch on the top of the hut she saw the town of Mafooti. On the plain to the west she saw a number of black dots, which she took to be people and cattle travelling away from the town. In the nek to the east she saw more dots, each of them crested with white, and carrying something white. Surely it was a Zulu impi marching! Some of these dots had come to the wall of the town; yes, and some of them were on the crest of it, while yet others were creeping down its main street not a hundred yards away.

Also these caught sight of something, for they paused and seemed to fall together as though in fear. Lastly, just before the light went out, she perceived Ishmael in the yard below, glaring up at her, for he, too, had seen her, seen her standing above him in the air, the spear in her hand, and in her eyes, fire. But of the dots to the east and of the dots to the west he had seen nothing. He appeared to fall to his knees and remain there muttering. Then the Heavens blazed again, for the storm was coming up, and by the flare of them he read the truth. This was no ghost, but the living woman.

"Oh!" he said, recovering himself, "that's where

you've got to, is it ? Come down, Rachel, and let us talk."

She made no answer, none at all, she who was so curious to see what he would do. For quite a long while he harangued her from below, walking round and round the hut. Then at length in despair he began to climb it. But in that darkness which now and again turned to dazzling light, unlike Rachel, he found the task difficult, and once, missing his hold, he fell to the ground heavily. Finding his feet he rushed at the hut with an oath, and clutching the straw and the grass strings that bound it, struggled almost to the top, to be met by the point of Rachel's spear held at his face. There then he hung, looking like a toad on the slope of a rock, unable to advance because of that spear, and unwilling to go down, lest his labour must be begun again.

" Rachel," he said, " come down, Rachel. Whatever I have done has been for your sake, come down and tell me that you forgive me."

She laughed out loud, a wild, screaming laugh, for really he looked most ridiculous, sprawling there on the bend of the hut, and the lightning showed her all sorts of pictures in his eyes.

" Did Richard Darrien forgive you ? " she asked. " And what did you mix that poison with ? Milk ? The milk of human kindness ! It was a very good poison, Toad, so good that I think you must have drawn it from your own blood. When you are dead all the Bushmen should come and dip their arrows in you, for then even crocodiles and the big snakes would die at a scratch."

He made no answer, so she went on.

" Have your people forgiven you ? If so, why do they flee away, carrying that white thing which was a man. Have my father and mother forgiven you ? Do you hear what they are saying to me—that judgment is the Lord's ? Have the Zulus forgiven you,

the Zulus who believe that judgment is the King's—and the Inkosazana's? Turn now, and ask them, for here they are," and she pointed over his head with her spear. "Turn, Toad, and set out your case and I will stand above and try it, the case of Dingaan against Ibubesi, and one by one I will call up all those who died through you, and they shall give their evidence, and I, the Judge, will sum it up to a jury of sharp spears. See, here come the spears. Look at the wall, Toad, *look at the wall!*"

As she raved on and pointed with her assegai, the lightning blazed out, and Ishmael, who had looked round at her bidding, saw Zulu warriors leaping down from the crest of the wall, and Zulu captains rushing in by the opened door. At this terrible sight he slid to the ground purposing to reach his gun which he had left there, and defend or kill himself, who knows which? But before ever he could lay a hand upon it, those fierce men had pounced upon him like leopards on a goat. Now they held him fast, and a voice—it was that of Tamboosa, called through the darkness,

"Hail to thee! Inkosazana. Come down now and pass judgment on this wild beast who would have harmed thee."

"Tamboosa," she cried, "the Inkosazana has fled away, only the white woman in whom she dwelt remains; her spirit hangs in wrath over the people of the Zulus, as an eagle hangs above a hare. Tamboosa, there is blood between the Inkosazana and the people of the Zulus, the blood of those who gave her the body that she wore, who lie slain by them upon the bed at Ramah. Tamboosa, there is blood between her and Ibubesi, the blood of the white man who loved the body that she wore, and whom she loved, the white lord whom Ibubesi did to death this day because she who was the Inkosazana would not give herself to him. Tamboosa, the Inkosazana has suffered much from

"She seemed no woman, but a queen of Spirits"
(*see page 245*).

this Ibubesi, many an insult, many a shame, and when she called upon the Zulus, out of all their thousand thousands there was not a single spear to help her, because they were too busy killing those holy ones whom she called her father and her mother. And so, Tamboosa, the spirit of the Inkosazana departed like a bird from the egg, leaving but this shell behind, that is full of sorrows and of dreams. Yet, Tamboosa, she still speaks through these lips of mine, and she says that from the seed of blood that they have sown, her people, the Zulus, must harvest woe upon woe, as while she dwelt among them, she warned them that it would be if ill came to those she loved. Tamboosa, this is her command—that ye shield the breast in which she hid from the wild beast, Ibubesi and all evil men, and that ye lead this shape to Noie, the daughter of Seyapi, whom Ibubesi brought to death, for with Noie it would dwell."

Thus she wailed through the deep darkness, while the soldiers who packed the space below groaned in their grief and terror because the soul of the Inkosazana had been made a wanderer by their sins, and the curse of the Inkosazana had fallen on their land.

Again the lightning flared and in it they saw her standing on the crest of the hut. She had let drop the spear as though she needed it no more, and her arms were outstretched to the Heavens, and her beautiful face was upturned, and her long hair floated in the wind. Seen thus by that quick, white light, which shone in the madness of her eyes, she seemed no woman but what they had fabled her to be, a queen of Spirits, and at the vision of her they groaned again, while some of them fell to the earth and hid their faces with their hands.

The darkness fell once more, and a man went into the hut to bring out the lamp that burned there. When he returned Rachel stood among them; they had not seen or heard her descend. Ishmael saw

her also, and feeling his doom in the fierce eyes that glowered at him, stretched out his hand and caught her by the robe, praying for pity.

At his touch she uttered a wild scream, which pierced like a knife through the hearts of all that heard it.

"Suffer it not," she cried, "oh! my people, suffer not that I be thus defiled."

They rent him from her with blows and execrations, looking up to their chief for his word to tear him to pieces.

"No," said Tamboosa, grimly, "he shall to the King to tell this story ere he die."

"Save me, Rachel, save me," he moaned. "You don't know what they mean. I was mad with love for you, do not judge me harshly and send me to be tortured."

This appeal of his seemed to pierce the darkness of her brain, and for a little while her face grew human.

"I judge not," she answered in Zulu; "pray to the Great One above who judges. Oh! man, man," she went on in a kind of eerie whisper, "what have I done to you that you should treat me thus? Why did you command the soldiers to kill my father and my mother? Why did you poison my lover? Why did you drive away my soul, and fill me with this madness? Take me away from this accursed town, Tamboosa, before Heaven's vengeance falls on it, and let me see that face no more."

Then some of them made a guard about her and led her thence, along the central street, and through the barricaded gates, that they broke down for her passage. They led her to a little cave in the slope of the opposing hill, for although no rain fell, the gathered storm was breaking; the lightning flashed thick and fast, the thunder groaned and bellowed and a wild wind beat the screeching trees.

Here in the mouth of this cave Rachel sat herself down and looked at the kraal, Mafooti, awaiting she

knew not what, while the impi pillaged the town, and Ishmael, already half dead with fear, remained bound to the roof-tree of the hut that had been her prison.

Whilst she waited thus, and watched, of a sudden one of the outer huts began to burn, though whether the lightning or some soldier had fired it none could tell. Then, in an instant, as it seemed, driven by the raging wind, the flame leapt from roof to roof till Mafooti was but a sheet of fire. The soldiers at their work of pillage saw and rushed hither and thither, confusedly, for they did not know the paths, and were tangled in the fences.

A figure appeared running down the central street, a figure of flame, for his clothes burned on him, and those by Rachel said,

"See, see, *Ibubesi!*"

He could not reach the gate, for a blazing hut fell across his path. Turning he sped to the edge of a cliff that rose near by, where, because of its steepness, there was no wall. Here for a while he ran up and down till the wind-driven fire from new-lit huts at its brink leapt out upon him like thin, scarlet tongues. He threw himself to the ground, he rose again, beating his head with his hand, for his long hair was ablaze. Then in his torment and despair, of a sudden he threw himself backwards into the dark gulf beneath. Fifty feet and more he fell to the rocks below, and where he fell there he lay till he died, and on the morrow the Zulus found and buried him.

Thus did Ishmael depart out of the life of Rachel to the end which he had earned.

Nor did he go alone, for of the Zulus in the town many were caught by the fire, and perished, so many that when the regiment mustered at dawn, that same regiment which had escorted the Inkosazana to the banks of the Tugela, fifty and one men were missing, whilst numbers of others appeared burned and blistered.

"Ah!" said Tamboosa as he surveyed the injured

and counted the dead, "the curse is quickly at work among us, and I think that this is but the beginning of evil. Well, I expected it, no less."

As for the town of Mafooti it was utterly destroyed. To this day the place is a wilderness where the grass grows rank between the crumbling, fire-blackened walls. For the people of Ibubesi who had fled, returned thither no more, nor would others build where it had been, since still they swear that the spot is haunted by the figure of a white man who, in times of thunder, rushes across it wrapped in fire, and plunges blazing into the gulf upon its northern side.

After the storm came the rain which poured all night long, a steady sheet of water reaching from earth to heaven. Rachel watched it vacantly for a while, then went to the head of the little cave and lay down wrapped in karosses that they had made ready for her. Moreover, she slept as a child sleeps until the sun shone bright on the morrow, then she woke and asked for food.

But the impi did not sleep. All night long the soldiers stood in huddled groups beneath such shelter as the trees and rocks would give to them, while the water poured on them pitilessly till their teeth chattered and their limbs were frozen. Some died of the cold that night, and afterwards many others fell sick of agues and fevers of the lungs which killed a number of them.

In the morning when the storm was past and the sun shone hotly Tamboosa called the Council of the captains together, and consulted with them as to whether they should follow after the people of Mafooti who had fled, and destroy them, or return straight to Zululand. Most of the captains answered that of Mafooti and its people they had seen enough. Ibubesi was dead, slain by the vengeance of Heaven; the Inkosazana they had rescued, alive, though filled with madness; the white lord, Dario, had been

murdered by Ibubesi, it was said with poison, and doubtless his body was burned in the fire. As for the people of Mafooti themselves, it would seem that most of them were innocent as they had fled the place, deserting their chief. To these arguments other captains answered that the people of Mafooti were not innocent inasmuch as they had helped Ibubesi to carry off the Inkosazana and the white lord, Dario, from Ramah, and consented to their imprisonment and to the death of one of them, only flying when they had tidings that the impi was on the way. Moreover the command was that every one of these dogs should be killed, whereas they had killed none of them, but only taken those cattle which were left behind in their flight. At length the dispute growing fierce, the captains being unable to come to an agreement, decided that they would lay the matter before the Inkosazana, and be guided by the words that fell from her, if they could understand them.

So Tamboosa went into the cave with one other man, and talked to Rachel, who sat staring at him with stony eyes as though she understood nothing. When at length he ceased, however, she cried:

"Lead me to Noie at the Great Place. Lead me to Noie," nor would she say any more.

So, as the people of Mafooti had fled they knew not where, and they had secured some of the cattle, and as many of the soldiers were sick from the cold and of burns received in the fire, Tamboosa told the regiment that it was the will of the Inkosazana that they should return to Zululand.

A while later they started, those of them who were so badly burned that they could not travel, being carried on shields. But Rachel would not be carried, choosing to walk alone surrounded at a distance by a ring of soldiers who guarded her. For hours she walked thus, showing no sign of weariness, but now and again bursting out into shrill laughter, as though

she saw things that moved her to merriment. Only the regiment that listened was not merry, for it had heard the words that the Inkosazana spoke in the town of Mafooti, foretelling evil to the Zulus because of the blood that was between them and her. They thought that she laughed over the misfortunes that were to come, and over those that had already befallen them in the fire and in the rain.

About midday they halted to eat, and as before Rachel took food in plenty, for now that her mind was wandering her body seemed to call for sustenance. When their meal was finished they moved down to the banks of the Buffalo River, which ran near by, to find that it was in great flood after the heavy rain and that it was not safe to try the ford. So they determined to camp there on the banks, murmuring among themselves that all went ill with them upon this journey, as was to be expected, and that they would have done better if they had spent the time in hunting down the people of Mafooti, instead of sitting idle like tired storks upon the banks of a river. Yet bad as things might seem, they were destined to be worse, for while some of them were cutting boughs and grass to make a hut for the Inkosazana, Rachel, who stood watching them with empty eyes, of a sudden laughed in her mad fashion, and sped like a swallow to the lip of the foaming ford. Here, before they could come up with her, she threw off the outer cloak she wore and rushed into the water till the current bore her from her feet. Then while the whole regiment shouted in dismay, she began to swim, striking out for the further bank, and being swept downwards by the stream. Now Tamboosa, who was almost crazed with fear lest she should drown, called out that where the Inkosazana went, they must follow, even to their deaths.

"It is so!" answered the soldiers, as each man locking his arms round the middle of him who stood

in front, company by company, they plunged into the water in a fourfold chain, hoping thus to bridge it from bank to bank.

Meanwhile Rachel swam on in the strength of her madness as a woman has seldom swum before. Again and again the muddy waters broke over her head and the soldiers groaned, thinking that she was drowned. But always that golden hair reappeared above them. A great tree swept down upon her but she dived beneath it. She was dashed against a tall rock, but she warded herself away from it with her hands and still swam on, till at length with a shout of joy the Zulus saw her find her feet and struggle slowly to the further bank. Yes, and up it till she reached its crest where she stood and watched them idly as though unconscious of the danger she had passed, and of the water that ran from her hair and breast.

"Where a woman can go, we can follow," said some, but others answered:

"She is not a woman, but a spirit. Death himself cannot kill her."

Now the fourfold chain was near the centre of the ford, when suddenly those at the tip of it were lifted from their feet as Rachel had been, nor could those behind hold on to them. They were torn from their grasp and swept away, the most of them never to be seen again, for of these men but few could swim. Thrice this happened until strong swimmers were sent to the front, and at length these men won across as Rachel had done, and caught hold of the stones on the further side, thus forming a living chain from bank to bank, whereof the centre floated and was bent outwards by the weight of the water as the back of a bow bends when the string is drawn.

By the help of this human rope thus formed the companies began to come over, supporting themselves against it, till presently the strain and the push of them and of the angry river overcame its strength,

and the chain burst in the middle so that many were borne down the stream and drowned. Yet with risk and toil and loss it joined itself together again and held fast until every man was over, save the sick and some lads who were left to tend them and the cattle on the further bank. Then that cable of brave warriors began to struggle forward like a great snake dragging its tail after it, and so by degrees drew itself to safety and gasping out foam and water saluted the Inkosazana where she stood.

Many were drowned, and others were bruised by rocks, but of this they thought little since she was safe and they had found her again, to have lost whom would have been a shame from generation to generation. She watched the captains reckoning up the number of the dead, and when Tamboosa and some of them came to make report of it to her, a shadow as of pity floated across her stony eyes.

"Not on my head," she cried, "not on my head! There is blood between the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus, and that blood avenges itself in blood," and she laughed her eerie laugh.

"It is true, it is just, O Queen," answered Tamboosa solemnly; "the nation must pay for the sin of its children as the wild beast, Ibubesi, has paid for his sins."

Then as they could travel no further that day, they built a hut, and lit a great fire by which Rachel sat and dried herself, nor did she take any harm from the water, for as the Zulus had said, it seemed as though nothing could harm her now.

The soldiers also lit fires and despatched messengers to neighbouring kraals commanding them to bring food, and to send maidens to attend on the Inkosazana, while others went to a mountain to call all this ill-tidings from hill to hill till it came to the Great Place of the King.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CURSE OF THE INKOSAZANA

THAT night the regiment and Rachel slept upon the bank of the river, and nothing happened save that lions carried off two soldiers, while two more who had been injured against the rocks, died. Also others fell sick. On the following morning food arrived in plenty from the neighbouring kraals, and with it some girls of high birth to attend upon the Inkosazana.

But with these Rachel would have nothing to do, and when they came near to her only said :

" Where is Noie, daughter of Seyapi ? Lead me to Noie."

So they began their march again, Rachel walking as before in the centre of a ring of soldiers, and that night slept at a kraal upon a hill. Here messengers from the King met them charged with many fine words, to which Rachel listened without understanding them, and then scared them away with her laughter. Also they brought a beautiful cloak made of the skins of a rare white monkey, and this she took and wrapped herself in it, for she seemed to understand that her clothes were ragged.

That day they passed through fertile country, where much corn was grown. Here they saw a strange sight, for as they went clouds seemed to arise in the sky from behind them, which presently were seen to be not clouds, but tens of millions of great winged grasshoppers that lit upon the corn, devouring it and every other green thing. Within a few hours nothing was

left except the roots and bare branches, while the women of that land ran to and fro wailing, knowing that next winter they and their children must starve, and the cattle lowed about them hungrily, for the locusts had devoured all the grass. Moreover, having eaten everything, these insects themselves began to die in myriads so that soon the air was poisoned. The waters also were poisoned with their dead bodies, and at once sickness came which presently grew into a pestilence.

Now the men of the country sent a deputation to the Inkosazana, praying her to remove the curse, but when they had spoken she only repeated the words she had used upon the banks of the Buffalo River.

"Not on my head, not on my head! There is blood between the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus. Famine and war and death upon the people of the Zulus because they have shed the holy blood!"

Then the men grew afraid and went away, and the regiment marched on accompanied by the myriads of the locusts that wasted all the land through which they passed.

At length, followed by a wail of misery, they came to the Great Place and entered it, preceded by the locusts which already were heaped up in the streets like winter leaves, and for lack of other provender gnawed at the straw of the huts, and the shields and moochas of the soldiers. It was a strange sight to see the men trying to stamp them to death, and the women and children rushing to and fro shrieking and brushing them from their hair.

Amid such scenes as these they passed through the town of Umgugundhlovu into which Rachel had been brought in order that the people might see that their Inkosazana had returned, and on to that kraal upon the hill, where she had spent all those weary weeks until Richard came. She reached it as the sun was setting, and although she did not seem to

know any of them was received with joy and adoration by the women who had been her attendants. Here she slept that night, for they thought that she must be too weary to see the King at once; moreover, he desired first to receive the reports of Tamboosa and the captains, and to learn all that had happened in this strange business.

Next morning, whilst Rachel sat by the pool in which once she had seen the vision of Richard, Tamboosa and an escort came to bring her to Dingaan. When they told her this, she said neither yea nor nay, but, refusing to enter a litter they had brought, walked at the head of them back to the Great Place, and, watched by thousands, through the locust-strewn streets to the Intunkulu, the House of the King. Here, in front of his hut, and surrounded by his Council, sat Dingaan and the indunas who rose to greet her with the royal salute. She advanced towards them slowly, looking more beautiful than ever she had done, but with wild, wandering eyes. They set a stool for her, and she sat down on the stool, staring at the ground. Then as she said nothing, Dingaan, who seemed very sad and full of fear, commanded Tamboosa to report all that had happened in the ears of the Council, and he took up his tale.

He told of the journey to the Tugela, and of how the Inkosazana and the white lord, Dario, had crossed the river alone but a few hours after Ibubesi, ordering him to follow next day, also alone, with the white ox that bore her baggage. He told how he had done so, and on reaching Ramah had found the white Umfundusi and his wife lying dead in their room, and on the floor of it a Zulu of the men who had been sent with Ibubesi, also dead, and in the garden of the house a man of the people of Ibubesi, dying, who, with his last breath narrated to him the story of the taking of the Inkosazana and the white lord, by Ibubesi. He told of how he had run to the town of Mafooti, to find out

the truth, and of the message that he had sent by the herd boy to Ibubesi and his people. Lastly he told all the rest of that story, of how he had come back to Zululand "as though he had wings," and finding the regiment that had escorted the Inkosazana still in camp near the river, had returned with them to attack Mafooti, which they discovered to be deserted by its people.

While he described how by the flare of the lightning they saw the Inkosazana standing on the roof of a hut, how they captured the wild beast, Ibubesi, how they learned that the Spirit of the Inkosazana was "wandering," and the dreadful words she said, the burning of Mafooti, and the fearful death of Ibubesi by fire, all the Council listened in utter silence. Thus they listened also whilst he showed how evil after evil had fallen upon the regiment, evil by fire and water and sickness, as evil had fallen upon the land also by the plague of locusts.

At length Tamboosa's story was finished, and certain men were brought forward bound, who had been the captains of the band that went with Ishmael, among them those who had killed, or caused to die, the white teacher and his wife.

Upon the stern command of the King these men also told their story, saying that they had not meant to kill the white man and that what they did was done at the word of Ibubesi, whom they were ordered to obey in all things, but who, as they now understood, had dared to lay a plot to capture the Inkosazana for himself. When they had finished the King rose and poured out his wrath on them, because through their deeds the Spirit of the Inkosazana had been driven away, and her curse laid upon the land, where already it was at work. Then he commanded that they should be led thence, all of them, and put to a terrible death, and with them those captains of the regiment who had spoken against the following of the people

of Mafooti, who should, he said, have been destroyed, every one.

At his words executioners rushed in to seize these wretched men, and then it was that Rachel, who all this while had sat as though she heard nothing, lifted her head and spoke for the first time.

"Set them free, set them free!" she commanded. "Vengeance is from Heaven, and Heaven will pour it out in plenty. Not on my hands, not on my hands shall be the blood of those who sent the Spirit of the Inkosazana to wander in the skies. Who was it that bade an impi run to Ramah, and what did they there in the house of those who gave me birth? When the Master calls, the dogs must search and kill. Set them free, lest there be more blood between the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus."

When he heard these words, spoken in a strange, wailing voice, Dingaan trembled, for he knew that it was he who had bidden his dogs to run.

"Let them go," he said, "and let the land see them no more for ever."

So those men went thankfully enough, and the land saw them no more. As they passed the gate other men entered, starved and hungry-looking men, whose bones almost pierced their skins, and who carried in their hands remnants of shields that looked as though they had been gnawed by rats. They saluted the King with feeble voices, and squatted down upon the ground.

"Who are those skeletons," he asked angrily, "who dare to break in upon my Council?"

"King," answered their spokesman, "we are captains of the Nobambe, the Nodwenge, and the Isangu regiments whom thou didst send to destroy the chief, Madaku and his people, who dwell far away in the swamp land to the north near where the Great River runs into the sea. King, we could not come at this chief because he fled away on rafts and in boats,

he and his people, and we lost our path among the reeds where again and again we were ambushed, and many of us sank in the swamps and were drowned. Also we found no food and were forced to live upon our shields," and he held up a gnawed fragment in his hand. "So we perished by hundreds, and of all who went forth but twenty-one times ten remain alive."

When Dingaan heard this he groaned, for his arms had been defeated and three of his best regiments destroyed. But Rachel laughed aloud, the terrible laugh at which all who heard it shivered.

"Did I not say," she asked, "that Heaven would pour out its vengeance in plenty because of the blood that runs between the Spirit of the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus?"

"Truly this curse works fast and well," exclaimed Dingaan. Then turning to the men, he shouted: "Be gone, you starved rats, you cowards who do not know how to fight, and be thankful that the Great Elephant (Chaka) is dead, for surely he would have fed you upon shields until you perished."

So these captains crept away also.

Ere they were well gone a man appeared craving audience, a fat man who wore a woeful countenance, for tears ran down his bloated cheeks. Dingaan knew him well, for every week he saw him, and sometimes oftener.

"What is it, Movo, keeper of the kine," he asked anxiously, "that you break in on me thus at my Council?"

"O, King," answered the fat man, "pardon me, but, O King, my tidings are so sad that I availed myself of my privilege, and pushed past the guards at thy gate."

"Those who bear ill news ever run quickly," grunted the King. "Stop that weeping and out with it, Movo."

"Shaker of the Earth! Eater up of Enemies!" said Movo, "thou thyself art eaten up, or at least thy cattle are, the cattle that I love. A sore sickness has fallen on the great herd, the royal herd, the white herd with the twisted horns, and," here he paused to sob, "a thousand of them are dead, and many more are sick. Soon there will be no herd left," and he wept outright.

Now Dingaan leapt up in his wrath and struck the man so sharply with the shaft of the spear he held that it broke upon his head.

"Fat fool that you are," he exclaimed. "What have you done to my cattle? Speak, or you shall be slain for an evil-doer who has bewitched them."

"Is it a crime to be fat, O King," answered the indignant Movo, rubbing his skull, "when others are so much fatter?" and he looked reproachfully at Dingaan's enormous person. "Can I help it if a thousand of thy oxen are now but hides for shields?"

"Will you answer, or will you taste the other end of the spear?" asked Dingaan, grasping the broken shaft just above the blade. "What have you done to my cattle?"

"O King, I have done nothing to them. Can I help it if those accursed beasts choose to eat dead locusts instead of grass, and foam at the mouth and choke? Can the cattle help it if all the grass has become locusts so that there is nothing else for them to eat? I am not to blame, and the cattle are not to blame. Blame the Heavens above, to whom thou, or rather," he added hastily, "some wicked wizard must have given offence, for no such thing as this has been known before in Zululand."

Again Rachel broke in with her wild laughter, and said:

"Did I not tell thee that vengeance would be poured down in plenty, poured down like the rain, O Dingaan? Vengeance on the King, vengeance on the

people, vengeance on the soldiers, vengeance on the corn, vengeance on the kine, vengeance on the whole land, because blood runs between the Spirit of the Inkosazana and the race of the Ama-zulu, whom once she loved!"

"It is true, it is true, White One, but why dost thou say it so often?" groaned the maddened Dingaan. "Why show the whip to those who must feel the blow? Now, you Movo, have you done?"

"Not quite, O King," answered the melancholy Movo, still rubbing his head. "The cattle of all the kraals around are dying of this same sickness, and the crops are quite eaten, so that next winter everyone must perish of famine."

"Is that all, O Movo?"

"Not quite, O King, since messengers have come to me, as head keeper of the kine, to say that all the other royal herds within two days' journey are also stricken, although if I understand them right, of some other pest. Also, which I forgot to add——"

"Hunt out this bearer of ill-tidings," roared Dingaan, "hunt him out, and send orders that his own cattle be taken to fill up the holes in my blanket."

Now some attendants sprang on the luckless Movo and began to beat him with their sticks. Still, before he reached the gates he succeeded in turning round weeping in good earnest and shouted:

"It is quite useless, O King, all my cattle are dead, too. They will find nothing but the horns and the hoofs, for I have sold the hides to the shield-makers."

Then they thrust him forth.

He was gone, and for a while there was silence, for despair filled the hearts of the King and his Councillors, as they gazed at Rachel dismayed, wondering within themselves how they might be rid of her and of the evils which she had brought upon them because of the blood of her people which lay at their doors.

Whilst they still stared thus in silence yet another

messenger came running through the gate like one in great haste.

"Now I am minded to order this fellow to be killed before he opens his mouth," said Dingaan, "for of a surety he also is a bearer of ill-tidings."

"Nay, O King," cried out the man in alarm, "my news is only that an embassy waits without."

"From whom?" asked Dingaan anxiously. "The white Amaboona?"

"Nay, O King, from the queen of the Ghost people to whom thou didst despatch Noie, daughter of Seyapi, a while ago."

Hearing the name Noie, Rachel lifted her head, and for the first time her face grew human.

"I remember," said Dingaan. "Admit the embassy."

Then followed a long pause. At length the gate opened and through it appeared Noie herself, clad in a garb of spotless white, and somewhat travel-worn, but beautiful as ever. She was escorted by four gigantic men who were naked except for their moochas, but wore copper ornaments on their wrists and ankles, and great rings of copper in their ears. After her came three litters whereof the grass curtains were tightly drawn, carried by bearers of the same size and race, and after these a bodyguard of fifty soldiers of a like stature. This strange and barbarous-looking company advanced slowly, whilst the Council stared at them wondering, for never before had they seen people so huge, and arriving in front of the King set down the litters, staring back in answer with their great round eyes.

As they came Rachel rose from her stool and turned slowly so that she and Noie, who walked in front of the embassy, stood face to face. For a moment they gazed at each other, then Noie, running forward, knelt before Rachel and kissed the hem of her robe, but Rachel bent down and lifted her up in her strong arms, embracing her as a mother embraces a child.

"Where hast thou been, Sister?" she asked. "I have sought thee long."

"Surely on thy business, Zoola," answered Noie, scanning her curiously. "Dost thou not remember?"

"Nay, I remember naught, Noie, save that I have sought thee long. My Spirit wanders, Noie."

"Lady," she said, "my people told me that it was so. They told me many terrible things, they who can see afar, they for whom distance has no gates, but I did not believe them. Now I see with my own eyes. Be at peace, Lady, my people will give thee back thy Spirit, though perchance thou must travel to find it, for in their land all spirits dwell. Be at peace and listen."

"With thee, Noie, I am at peace," replied Rachel, and still holding her hand, she reseated herself upon the stool.

"Where are the messengers?" asked Dingaan. "I see none."

"King," answered Noie, "they shall appear."

Then she made signs to the escort of giants, some of whom came forward and drew the curtains of the litters, whilst others opened huge umbrellas of split cane which they carried in their hands.

"Now what weapons are these?" asked Dingaan. "Daughter of Seyapi, you know that none may appear before the King armed."

"Weapons against the sun, O King, which my people hate."

"And who are the wizards that hate the sun?" queried Dingaan again in an astonished voice. Then he was silent for out of the first litter came a little man, pale as the shoot from a bulb that has grown in darkness, with large, soft eyes like the eyes of an owl, that blinked in the light, and long hair out of which all the colour seemed to have faded.

As the man, who, like Noie, was dressed in a white robe, and in size measured no more than a twelve-year

old child, set his sandalled feet upon the ground, one of the huge guards sprang forward to shield him with the umbrella, but being awkward, struck his leg against the pole of the litter and stumbled against him, nearly knocking him to the ground, and in his efforts to save himself, letting fall the umbrella. The little man turned on him furiously, and holding one hand above his head as though to shield himself from the sun, with the other pointed at him, speaking in a low sibilant voice that sounded like the hiss of a snake. Thereon the guard fell to his knees, and bending down with outstretched arms, beat his forehead on the earth as though in prayer for mercy. The sight of this giant making supplication to one whom he could have killed with a blow, was so strange that Dingaan, unable to restrain his curiosity, asked Noie if the dwarf was ordering the other to be killed.

"Nay, King," answered Noie, "for blood is hateful to these people. He is saying that the soldier has offended many times. Therefore he curses him and tells him that he shall wither like a plucked leaf and die without seeing his home again."

"And will he die?" asked Dingaan.

"Certainly, King; those upon whom the Ghost-people lay that curse must obey the curse. Moreover, this man deserves his doom, for on the journey he killed another to take his food."

"Of a truth a terrible people!" said Dingaan uneasily. "Bid them lay no curse on me lest they should see more blood than they wish for."

"It is foolish to threaten the Great Ones of the Ghost-folk, King, for they hear even what they seem not to understand," answered Noie quietly.

"*Wow!*" exclaimed the King, "let my words be forgotten. I am sorry that I troubled them to come so far to visit me."

Meanwhile the offender had crept back upon his hands and knees, looking like a great beaten dog,

whilst another soldier, taking his umbrella, held it over the angry dwarf. Also from the other litters two more dwarfs had descended, so like to the first that it was difficult to tell them apart, and were in the same fashion sheltered by guards with umbrellas. Mats were brought for them also, and on these they sat themselves down at right angles to Dingaan, and to Rachel, whose stool was set in front of the King, whilst behind them stood three of their escort, each holding an umbrella over the head of one of them with the left hand, while with the right they fanned them with small branches upon which the leaves, although they were dead, remained green and shining.

With Dingaan and his Council the three dwarfs did not seem to trouble themselves, but at Rachel they peered earnestly. Then one of them made a sign and muttered something, whereon a soldier of the escort stepped forward with a fourth umbrella, which he opened over the heads of Rachel, and of Noie, who stood at her side.

"Why does he do that?" asked Dingaan. "The Inkosazana is not a bat that she fears the sun."

"He does it," answered Noie, "that the Inkosazana may sit in the shade of the wisdom of the Ghost-people, and that her heart which is hot with many wrongs, may grow cool in the shade."

"What does he know about the Inkosazana and her wrongs?" asked Dingaan again, but Noie only shrugged her shoulders and made no answer.

Now one of the dwarfs made another sign, whereon more guards advanced, carrying small bowls of polished wood. These bowls they set upon the ground before the three dwarfs, one before each of them, filling them to the brim with water from a gourd.

"If your people are thirsty, Noie," exclaimed the King, "I have beer for them to drink, for at least the locusts have left me that. Bid them throw away the water, and I will give them beer."

"It is not water, King," she answered, "but dew gathered from certain trees before sunrise, and it is their spirits that are thirsty for knowledge, not their bodies, for in this dew they read the truth."

"Then the Inkosazana must be of their family, Noie, for she read of the coming of the white chief Dario in water, or so they say."

"Perhaps, O King. If it is so these prophets will know it and acknowledge her."

Now for a long while there was silence, so long a while indeed that Dingaan and his Councillors began to move uneasily, for they felt as though the dwarf men were fingering their heart-strings. At length the three dwarfs lifted their wrinkled faces that were bleached to the colour of half-ripe corn, and gazed at each other with their round, owl-like eyes; then as though with one accord they said to each other:

"What seest thou, Priest?" and at some sign from them Noie translated the words into Zulu.

Now the first of them, he who had cursed the soldier, spoke in his low hissing voice, a voice like to the whisper of leaves in the wind, Noie rendering his words.

"I see two maidens standing by a house that moves when cattle draw it. One of them is dark-skinned, it is she," and he pointed to Noie, "the other is fair-skinned, it is she," and he pointed to Rachel. "They cast, each of them, a hair from her head into the air. The black hair falls to the ground, but a spirit catches the hair of gold and bears it northward. It is the spirit of Seyapi whom the Zulus slew. Northwards he bears it, and lays it in the hand of the Mother of the Trees, and with it a message."

"Yes, with it a message," repeated the other two nodding their heads.

Then one of them drew a little package wrapped in leaves from his robe, and motioned to Noie that

she should give it to Rachel. Noie obeyed and the man said :

" Let us see if she has vision. Tell us, thou White One, what lies within the leaves."

Rachel, who had been sitting like a person in a dream, took the packet, and without looking at it, answered :

" Many other leaves, and within the last of them a hair from this head of mine. I see it, but three knots have been tied therein. They are three great troubles."

" Open," said the dwarf to Noie, who cut the fibre binding the packet, and unfolded many layers of leaves. Within the last leaf was a golden hair, and in it were tied three knots.

Noie laid the hair upon the head of Rachel—it was hers. Then she showed it to the King and his Council, who stared at the knots not knowing what to say, and after they had looked at it, refolded it in the leaves and returned the packet to the dwarf.

Now the dwarf who had read the picture in his bowl turned to him who sat nearest and asked :

" What seest thou, Priest ? "

The man stared at the limpid water and answered :

" I see this place at night. I see yonder King and his Councillors talking to a white man with evil eyes and the face of a hawk, who has been wounded on the head and foot. I read their lips. They bargain together ; it is of the bringing of an old prophet and his wife hither by force. I see the prophet and his wife in a house, and with them Zulus. By the command of the white man with the evil eyes the Zulus kill the prophet whose head is bald, and his wife dies upon the bed. Before they kill the prophet he slays one of the Zulus with smoke that comes from an iron tube."

When he heard all this Dingaan groaned, but the dwarf who had spoken, taking no heed of him, said to the third dwarf :

"What seest thou, Priest?" to which that dwarf answered:

"I see the White One yonder standing on a hut, but her Spirit has fled from her, it has fled from her to haunt the Trees. In her hand is a spear, and below is the white man with the evil eyes, held by Zulus. I read her words: she says that there is blood," and he shivered as he said the word, "yes, blood between her Spirit and the people of the Zulus. She prophesies evil to them. I see the ill; I see many burnt in a great fire. I see many drowned in an angry river. I see the demons of sickness lay hold of many. I see her Spirit call up the locusts from the coast land. I see it bring disaster on their arms; I see it scatter plague among their cattle; I see a dim shape that it summons striding towards this land. It travels fast over a winter veld, and the head of it is the head of a skull, and the name of it is Famine."

As he ended his words the three dwarfs bent forward, and with one movement seized their bowls and emptied them on to the ground, saying:

"Earth, Earth, drink, drink and bear record of these visions!"

Now the Council was much disturbed, for although there were great witch doctors among them, none had known magic like to this. Only Dingaan stared down brooding. Then he looked up, and his fat body shook with hoarse laughter.

"You play pretty tricks, little men," he said, "with your giants and your boughs and your huts that open, and your bowls of water. But for all that they are only tricks, since Noie, or others have told you of these things that happened in the past. Now if you are wizards indeed, read me the riddle of the words of the Inkosazana that she spoke before her Spirit left her because of the evil acts of the wolf, Ibubesi. Show me the answer to them in your bowls of water, little men, or be driven hence as cheats and

liars. Also tell us your names by which we may know you."

When Noie had translated this speech the three dwarfs gathered themselves under one umbrella, and spoke to each other; then they slid back to their places, and the first of them, he who had cursed the soldier, said:

"King of the Zulus, I am Eddo, this on my right is Pani, and that on my left is Hana. We are children of the Mother of the Trees; we are high-priests of the Grey-people, the Dream-people, who rule by dreams and wisdom, not by spears as thou dost, O King. We are the Ghost-kings whom the ghosts obey, we are the masters of the dead, and the readers of hearts. Those are our names and titles, O King. We have travelled hither because thou sentest a messenger of our own blood who whispered a strange tale in the ear of the Mother of the Trees, a tale of one of whom we knew already but desired to see," and all three of them nodded towards Rachel seated on her stool. "We will read thy riddle, O King, but first thou must fix the fee."

"What do you demand, Ghost-people?" asked Dingaan. "Cattle are somewhat scarce here just now, and wives I think would be of little use to you. What is there then that you desire, and I can give?"

They looked at each other, then Eddo said, pointing with his thin hand upon which the nails grew long:

"We ask for the White One who sits there. We think that her Spirit dwells with us already, and we ask her body that we may join it to the Spirit again."

Now the Council murmured, but Dingaan replied:

"Once we sought to keep her in whom dwelt the Inkosazana of the Zulus. But things have gone amiss, and she brings curses on us. If shape and spirit were joined together again, mayhap the curses would be taken off our heads. Yet we dare not give her to

you, unless she gives herself of her own will. Moreover, first the divination, then the pay. Is that enough ? "

"It is enough," they answered, speaking all together. "Set out the matter, King of the Zulus, and we will see what we can do."

Then Dingaan beckoned to a man with a withered hand who sat close to him, listening and noting all things, but saying nothing, and said :

"Stand forth, thou Mopo, and tell the tale."

So Mopo rose and began his story. He told how he alone among the people of the Zulus had thrice seen the spirit of the Inkosazana in the days of the "Black-One-who-was-gone." He told how many moons ago the white man, Ibubesi, had come to the Great Place speaking of a beautiful white maiden who was known by the name of the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, a maiden who ruled the lightning, and was not as other maidens are, and how he had been sent to see her, and found that as was the Spirit of the Inkosazana which he knew, so was this maiden.

"*Wow !*" he added, "save that the one walked on air and the other on earth, they are the same."

Moreover as a spirit she seemed wise. He told of the trapping of Noie, and of the decoying of Rachel into Zululand, and of the interview between her and the King by moonlight when she smelt out Noie. Now he was going on to speak of the question put by Dingaan to the Inkosazana, and the answer that she gave to him, when one of the little men who all this while sat as though they were asleep, blinking their eyes in the light—it was Eddo—said :

"Surely thou forgettest something, Tongue of the King, thou who art named Mopo, or Umbopa, Son of Makedama ; thou forgettest certain words which the Inkosazana whispered to thee when she threw her cloak about thy head ere thou fleddest away from the Council of the King. Of course we

do not know the words, but why dost thou not repeat them, Tongue of the King ? "

Mopo stared at them and his teeth chattered, then he answered :

" Because they have nothing to do with the story, Ghost-men ; because they were of my own death, which is a little matter."

The three dwarfs turned their heads towards each other and said, each to the other :

" Hearest thou, Priest, and hearest thou, Priest, and hearest thou, Priest ? He says that the words were of his own death and have nothing to do with the story," and they smiled and nodded and appeared to go to sleep again.

Now Mopo went on with his tale. He told of the question of the King, how he had asked the Inkosazana whether he should fall upon the Boers or let them be ; of how she had searched the Heavens with her eyes ; of how the meteor had travelled before them, and burst over the kraal, Umgugundhlovu, that star which she said was thrown by the hand of the Great-Great, the Umkulunkulu, and of how she had sworn that she also heard the feet of a people travelling over plain and mountain, and saw the rivers behind them running red with blood. Lastly he told of how she had refused to add to or take from her words, or to set out their meaning.

Then Mopo sat himself down again in the circle of the Councillors, and watched and hearkened like a hungry wolf.

" Ye have heard, Ghost-men," said the King. " Now, if ye are really wise, interpret to us the meaning of this saying of the Inkosazana, and of the running star which none can read."

The priests awoke and consulted with each other, then Eddo said :

" This matter is too high for us, King of the Zulus."

Dingaan heard and laughed angrily.

"I thought it, I thought it!" he cried. "Ye are but cheats after all who, like any common doctor, repeat the gossip that ye have heard, and pretend that it is a message from Heaven. Now why should I not whip you from my town with rods till ye see that red blood which ye so greatly fear?"

At the mention of the word blood, the little men seemed to curl up like cut grass before a fire; then Eddo smiled, a sickly smile, and answered:

"Be gentle, King, walk softly, King. We are but poor cheats, yet we will do our best, we, or another for us. A new bowl, a big bowl, a red bowl for the red King, and fill it to the brink with dew."

As he piped out the words a man from among their company appeared with a vessel much larger than those into which they had gazed, and made of beautiful, polished, blood-hued wood that gleamed in the sunlight. Eddo took it in his hand and another slave filled it with water from the gourd; the last drop of the water filled it to the brim. Then the three of them muttered invocations over it, and Eddo, beckoning to Noie, bade her bear it to the Inkosazana that she might gaze therein.

Rachel received it and looked; as she looked all the emptiness left her eyes which grew quick and active and full of horror.

"Thou seest something, Maiden?" queried Eddo.

"Aye," answered Rachel, "I see much. Must I speak?"

"Nay, nay! Breathe on the water thrice and fix the visions. Now bear the bowl to yonder King and let him look. Perchance he also will see something."

Rachel breathed on the water thrice, rose like one in a trance, and advancing to Dingaan placed the brimming bowl upon his knees.

"Look, King, look," cried Eddo, "and tell us if in what thou seest lies an answer to the oracle of the Inkosazana."

Dingaan stared at the water, angrily at first, as one who smells a trick. Then his face changed.

"By the head of the Black One," he said, "I see people fighting in this kraal, white men and Zulus, and the white men are mastered and the Zulus drag them out to death. The Zulus conquer, O my people. It is as I thought that it would be—that is the meaning of the riddle of the Inkosazana."

"Good, good," said the Council. "Doubtless it shall come to pass."

But the dwarf Eddo only smiled again and waved his hand.

"Look once more, King," he said in his low, hissing voice, and Dingaan looked.

Now his face darkened. "I see fire," he said. "Yes, in this kraal. Umgugundhlovu burns, my royal House burns and yonder come the white men riding upon horses. Oh! they are gone."

Eddo waved his hand, saying:

"Look again and tell us what thou seest, King."

Unwillingly enough, but as though he could not resist, Dingaan looked and said:

"I see a mountain whereof the top is like the shape of a woman, and between her knees is the mouth of a cave. Beneath the floor of that cave I see bodies, the body of a great man and the body of a girl; she must have been fair, that girl."

Now when he heard this the Councillor who was named Mopo, he with the withered hand, started up, then sat down again, but all were so intent upon listening to Dingaan that none noticed his movements save Noie and the priests of the ghosts.

"I see a man, a fat man come out of the cave," went on Dingaan. "He seems to be wounded and weary, also his stomach is sunken as though with hunger. Two other men seize him, a tall warrior with muscles that stand out on his legs, and another that is thin and short. They drag him up the mountain

" Dingaan leapt up in his rage and terror "
(*see page 273*).

to a great cleft that is between the breasts of her who sits thereon. They speak with him, but I cannot see their faces, for they are wrapped in mist, or the face of the fat man, for that also is wrapped in mist. They hale him to the edge of the cleft, they hurl him over, he falls headlong, and the mist is swept from his face. Ah! *it is my own face!*" *

"Priest," whispered each of the little men to his fellow in the dead silence that followed, "Priest, this King says that he sees his own face. Priest, tell me now, has not the spirit of the Inkosazana interpreted the oracle of the Inkosazana? Will not yonder King be hurled down this cleft? Is *he* not the star that falls?"

And they nodded and smiled at each other.

But Dingaan leapt up in his rage and terror, and with him leapt up the Councillors and witch doctors, all save he who was named Mopo, son of Makedama, who sat still gazing at the ground. Dingaan leapt up, and seizing the bowl hurled it from him so that the water in it fell over Rachel like rain from the clouds. He leapt up, and he cursed the Ghost-priests as evil wizards, bidding them begone from his land. He raved at them, he threatened them, he cursed them again and again. The little men sat still and smiled till he grew weary and ceased. Then they spoke to each other, saying:

"He has sprinkled the White One with the dew of our Trees, and henceforth she belongs to the Trees. Is it not so, Priest?"

They nodded in assent, and Eddo rose and addressed the King in a new voice, a shrill commanding voice, saying:

"O man, thou that art called a King and causest much blood to flow, thou that art but a bubble on a river of blood, thou slayer that shalt be slain, thou thrower of spears upon whom the spear shall fall,

* See "Nada the Lily," Chapter xxxv.

thou who shalt look upon the Face of Stone that knows not pity, thou whom the earth shall swallow, thou who shalt perish at the hands of——"

"The faces of the slayers were veiled, Priest," broke in the other two dwarfs, peeping up at him from beneath the shadow of their umbrellas; "surely the faces of those slayers were veiled, O Priest."

"Thou who shalt perish at the hands of avengers whose faces are veiled, thy riddle is read for thee as the Mother of the Trees decreed that it should be read. It is well read, it is truly read, it shall befall in its season. Now give to thy servants their reward and let them depart in peace. Give to them that White One whose lost Spirit spoke to thee from the water."

"Take her," roared Dingaan, "take her and begone, for to the Zulus she and Noie, the witch, bring naught but ill."

But one of the Council cried:

"The Inkosazana cannot be sent away with these magicians unless it is her will to go."

Then the little men nodded to Noie, and Noie whispered in the ear of Rachel.

Rachel listened and answered: "Whither thou goest, Noie, thither I go with thee, I who seek my Spirit."

So Noie took Rachel by the hand and led her from the Council-place of the King, and as she went, followed by the Ghost-priests and their escort, for the last time all the Councillors rose up and gave to her the royal salute. Only Dingaan sat upon the ground and beat it with his fists in fury.

Thus did the Inkosazana-y-Zoola depart from the Great Place of the King of the Zulus, and Mopo, the son of Makedama, shading his eyes with his hand, watched her go from between his withered fingers.

CHAPTER XIX

RACHEL FINDS HER SPIRIT

NORTHWARD, ever northward, journeyed Rachel with the Ghost-priests ; for days and weeks they journeyed, slowly, and for the most part at night, since these people dreaded the glare of the sun. Sometimes she was borne along in a litter with Noie upon the shoulders of the huge slaves, but more often she walked between the litters in the midst of a guard of soldiers, for now she was so strong that she never seemed to weary, nor even in the fever swamps where many fell ill, did any sickness touch her. Also this labour of the body seemed to soothe her wandering and tormented mind, as did the touch of Noie's hand and the sound of Noie's voice. At times, however, her madness got hold of her and she broke out into those bursts of wild laughter which had scared the Zulus. Then Eddo would descend from his litter and lay his long fingers on her forehead and look into her eyes in such a fashion that she went to sleep and was at peace. But if Noie spoke to her in these sleeps, she answered her questions, and even talked reasonably as she had done before the people of Mafooti laid the body of Richard at her feet, and she stood upon the roof of the hut which Ishmael strove to climb.

Thus it was that Noie came to learn all that had happened to her since they parted, for though she had gathered much from them, the Zulus could not, or would not tell her everything. In past days she had heard from Rachel of the lad, Richard Darrien,

who had been her companion years before through that night of storm on the island in the river, and now she understood that her lady loved this Richard, and that it was because of his murder by the wild brute, Ibubesi, that she had become mad.

Yes, she was mad, and for that reason Noie rejoiced that the dwarf people were taking her to their home, since if she could be cured at all, they were able to heal her, they the great doctors. Moreover, if these priests and the Zulus would have let her go, whither else could she have gone whose parents and lover were dead, except to the white people on the coast, who did not reverence the insane, as do all black folk, but would have locked her up in a house with others like her until she died. No, although she knew that there were dangers before them, many and great dangers, Noie rejoiced that things had befallen thus.

Also in her tender care already Rachel improved much, and Noie believed that one day she would be herself again. Only she wished that she and her lady were alone together; that there were no priests with them, and above all no Eddo. For Eddo as she knew well was jealous of her authority over Rachel; jealous too of the love that they bore one to the other. He wished to use this crazed white chieftainess who had been accepted as their Inkosazana by the great Zulu people, for his own purposes. This had been clear from the beginning, and that was why when he first heard of her he had consented to go on the embassy to Dingaan, since by his magic he could foresee much of the future that was dark to Noie, whose blood was mixed and who had not all the gifts of the Ghost-kings.

Moreover, the Mother of the Trees was Noie's great aunt, being the sister of her grandfather, or of his father, Noie was not sure which, for she had dwelt among them but a few days, and never thought to inquire of the matter. But of one thing she was sure, that Eddo the first priest, hated this Mother of the

Trees, who was named Nya, and desired that "when her tree fell" the next mother should be his servant, which Nya was not. Perhaps, reflected Noie, it was in his mind that her lady would fill this part, and being mad, obey him in all things.

Still she kept a watch upon her words, and even on her thoughts, for Eddo and his fellow-priests, Pani and Hana, were able to peer into human hearts, and read their secrets. Also she protected Rachel from him as much as she was able, never leaving her side for a moment, however weary she might be, for she feared lest he should become the master of her will. Only when the fits of madness fell upon her mistress, she was forced to allow Eddo to quell them with his touch and eye, since herself she lacked this power, nor dared she call the others to her help, for they were under the hand of Eddo.

Northward, ever northward. First they passed through the Zulus and their subject tribes who knew of them and of the Inkosazana. All of these were suffering from the curse that lay upon the land because, as they believed, there was blood between the Inkosazana and her people. The locusts devoured their crops and the plague ravaged their cattle, so that they were terrified of her, and of the little Grey-folk with whom she travelled, the wizards who had shown fearful things to Dingaan and left him sick with dread. They fled at their approach, only leaving a few of their old people to prostrate themselves before this Inkosazana who wandered in search of her own Spirit, and the Dream-men who dwelt with the ghosts in the heart of a forest, and to pray her and them to lift this cloud of evil from the land, bringing gifts of such things as were left to them.

At length all the Zulus were passed, and they entered into the territories of other tribes, wild, wandering tribes. But even these knew of the Ghost-kings, and attempted nothing against them, as they

had attempted nothing against Noie and her escort when she travelled through this land on her embassy to the People of the Trees. Indeed, some of their doctors would visit them at their camps and ask an oracle, or an interpretation of dreams, or a charm against their enemies, or a deadly poison, offering great gifts in return. At times Eddo and his fellow-priests would listen, and the giants would bring a tiny bowl filled with dew into which they gazed, telling them the pictures they saw there, though this they did but seldom, as the supply of dew which they had brought with them from their own country ran low, and since it could not be used twice they kept it for their own purposes.

Next they came to a country of vast swamps, where dwelt few men and many wild beasts, a country full of fevers and reeds and pools, in which lived snakes and crocodiles. Yet no harm came to them from these things, for the Ghost-priests had medicines that warded off sickness, and charms that protected them from all evil creatures, and in their bowls they read what road to take and how dangers could be avoided. So they passed the swamps safely; only here that slave whom Eddo had cursed at the kraal of Dingaan, and who from that day onward had wasted till he seemed to be nothing but a great skeleton, sickened and died.

"Did I not tell you that it should be so?" said Eddo to the other slaves, who trembled before him as reeds tremble in the wind. "Be warned, ye fools, who think that the strength of men lies in their bodies and their spears." Then he kicked the corpse of the dead giant gently with his sandalled foot, and bade his brothers throw him into a pool for the crocodiles to eat.

Having passed the swamps and many rivers, at length they turned westward, travelling for days over grassy uplands like to those of Natal, among which

wandered pastoral tribes with their herds of cattle. On these plains were multitudes of game and many lions, especially in the bush-clad slopes of great isolated mountains that rose up here and there. These lions roared round them at night, but the priests did not seem to be afraid, for when the brutes became overbold they placed deadly poison in the carcases of buck that the nomad tribes brought them as offerings, of which the lions ate and died in numbers. Also they sold some of the poison to the tribe for a great price in cattle, as to the delivery of which cattle they gave minute directions, for they knew that none dared to cheat the Mother of the Trees and her prophets.

After the plains were left behind, they reached a vast, fertile and low-lying country that sloped upwards for miles and miles, which, as Noie explained to Rachel, when she would listen, was the outer territory of the Ghost-people, for here dwelt the race of the Umkulus, or Great Ones, who were their slaves, that folk to which the soldiers of their escort belonged. Of these there were thousands and tens of thousands who earned their living by agriculture, since although they were so huge and fierce-looking, they did not fight unless they were attacked. The chiefs of this people had their dwellings in vast caves in the sides of cliffs which, if need be, could be turned into impregnable fortresses, but their real ruler was the Mother of the Trees, and their office was to protect the country of the Trees and furnish it with food, since the Tree-people were dreamers who did little work.

While they travelled through this land all the headmen of the Umkulus accompanied them, and every morning a council was held at which these made report to the priests of all that had chanced of late, and laid their causes before them for judgment. These causes Eddo and his fellow-priests heard and settled as seemed best to them, nor did any dare to dispute

their rulings. Indeed, even when they deposed a high chief and set another in his place, the man who had lost all knelt before them and thanked them for their goodness. Also they tried criminals who had stolen women or committed murder, but they never ordered such men to be slain outright. Sometimes Eddo would look at them dreamily and curse them in his slow, hissing voice, bidding them waste in body and in mind, as he had done to the soldier at Umgugundhlovu, and die within one year, or two, or three, as the case might be. Or sometimes, if the crime was very bad, he would command that they should be sent to "travel in the desert," that is, wander to and fro without food or water until death found them. Now and again miserable-looking men, mere skeletons, with hollow cheeks, and eyes that seemed to start from their heads, would appear at their camp weeping and imploring that the curse which had been laid upon them in past days should be taken off their heads. At such people Eddo and his brother-priests, Pani and Hana, would laugh softly, asking them how they throve upon the wrath of the Mother of the Trees, and whether they thought that others who saw them would be encouraged to sin as they had done. But when the poor wretches prayed that they might be killed outright with the spear, the priests shrank up in horror beneath their umbrellas, and asked if they were mad that they should wish them to "sprinkle their trees with blood."

One morning a number of these bewitched Umkulus, men, women and children, appeared, and when the three priests mocked them, as was their wont, and the guards, some of whom were their own relatives, sought to beat them away with sticks, threw themselves upon the ground and burst into weeping. Rachel, who was camped at a little distance with Noie, in a reed tent that the guard had made for her, which they folded up and carried as they did the umbrellas, heard the sound

of this lamentation, and came out followed by Noie. For a space she stood contemplating their misery with a troubled air, then asked Noie why these people seemed so starved and why they wept. Noie told her that when she was on her embassy the head of their kraal, an enormous man of middle age, whom she pointed out to Rachel, had sought to detain her because she was beautiful, and he wished to make her his wife, although he knew well that she was on an embassy to the Mother of the Trees. She had escaped, but it was for this reason that the curse of which they were perishing had been laid upon him and his folk.

Now Rachel went on to where the three priests sat beneath their umbrellas dozing away the hours of sunlight, beckoning to the doomed family to follow her.

"Wake, priests," she cried in a loud voice, and they looked up astonished, rubbing their eyes, and asked what was the matter.

"This," said Rachel. "I command you to lift the weight of your malediction off the head of these people who have suffered enough."

"Thou commandest us!" exclaimed Eddo astonished. "And if we will not, Beautiful One, what then?"

"Then," answered Rachel, "*I* will lift it and set it on to your heads, and you shall perish as they are perishing. Oh! you think me mad, you priests, who kill more cruelly than did the Zulus, and mad I am whose Spirit wanders. Yet I tell you that new powers grow within me, though whence they come I know not, and what I say I can perform."

Now they stared at her muttering together, and sending for a wooden bowl, peeped into it. Whatever it was they saw there did not please them, for at length Eddo addressed the crowd of suppliants, saying:

"The Mother of the Trees forgives; the knot

she tied she looses ; the tree she planted she digs up. You are forgiven. Bones, put on strength ; mouths, receive food ; eyes, forget your blindness, and feet, your wanderings. Grow fat and laugh ; increase and multiply ; for the curse we give you a blessing, such is the will of the Mother of the Trees."

"Nay, nay," cried Rachel, when she understood their words, "believe him not, ye starvelings. Such is the will of the Inkosazana of the Zulus, she who has lost her Spirit and another's, and travels all this weary way to find them."

Then her madness seemed to come upon her again, for she tossed her arms on high and burst into one of her wild fits of laughter. But those whom she had redeemed heeded it not, for they ran to her, and since they dared not touch her, or even her robe, kissed the ground on which she had stood and blessed her. Moreover from that moment they began to mend, and within a few days were changed folk. This Noie knew, for they followed up Rachel to the confines of the desert, and she saw it with her eyes. Also the fame of the deed spread among the Ŭmkulu people who groaned under the cruel rule of the Ghost-kings, and mad or sane, from that day forward they adored Rachel even more than the Zulus had done, and like the Zulus believed her to be a spirit. No mere human being, they declared, could have lifted off the curse of the Mother of the Trees from those upon whom it had fallen.

Thenceforward Eddo, Pani, and Hana hid their judgments from Rachel, and would not suffer such suppliants to approach the camp. Also when they seized a number of men because these had conspired together to rebel against the Ghost-people, and brought them on towards their own country for a certain purpose, they forced them to act as bearers like the others, so that Rachel might not guess their doom. For now, with all their power, they also were

afraid of this white Inkosazana, as Dingaan had been afraid.

So they travelled up this endless slope of fertile land, leaving all the kraals of the giant Umkulus behind them, and one morning at the dawn camped upon the edge of a terrible desert; a place of dry sands and sun-blasted rocks, that looked like the bottom of a drained ocean, where nothing lived save the fire lizards and certain venomous snakes that buried themselves in the sand, all except their heads, and only crawled out at night. After the people of the Umkulus this horrible waste was the great defence of the Ghost-kings, whose country it ringed about, since none could pass it without guides and water. Indeed, Noie had been forced to stay here for days with her escort, until the Mother of the Trees, learning of her coming in some strange fashion, had sent priests and guards to bring her to her land. But the Zulus who were with her they did not bring, except one witch-doctor to bear witness to her words. These they left among the Umkulus till she should return, nor were those Zulus sorry who had already heard enough of the magic of the Ghost-kings, and feared to come face to face with them.

But it is true that they also feared the Umkulus, whom, because of their great size and the fierceness of their air, the Zulus took to be evil spirits, though if this were so, they could not understand why they should obey a handful of grey dwarfs who lived far from them beyond the desert. Still these Umkulus did them no harm, for on her return Noie found them all safe and well.

That afternoon Rachel and the dwarfs plunged into the dreadful wilderness, heading straight for the ball of the sinking sun. Here, although she wished to do so, she was not allowed to walk, for fear lest the serpents should bite her, said Eddo, but must journey in the litter with Noie. So they entered it,

and were borne forward at a great pace, the bearers travelling at a run, and being often changed. Also many other bearers came with them, and on the shoulders of each of them was strapped a hide bag of water. Of this they soon discovered the reason, for the sand of that wilderness was white with salt; the air also seemed to be full of salt, so that the thirst of those who travelled there was sharp and constant, and if it could not be satisfied they died.

It was a very strange journey, and although she did not seem to take much note of them at the time, its details and surroundings burned themselves deeply into Rachel's mind. The hush of the infinite desert, the white moonlight gleaming upon the salt, white sand; the tall rocks which stood up here and there like unfinished obelisks and colossal statues, the snowy clouds of dust that rose beneath the feet of the company; the hoarse shouts of the guides, the close heat, the halts for water which was greedily swallowed in great gulps; the occasional cry and confusion when a man fell out exhausted, or because he had been bitten by one of the serpents. All these things, amongst others, were very strange.

Once Rachel asked vaguely what became of these outworn and snake-poisoned men, and Noie only shook her head in answer, for she did not think fit to tell her that they were left to find their way back, or to perish, as might chance.

All that night and for the first hours of the day that followed, they went forward swiftly, camping at last to eat and sleep in the shadow of a mass of rock that looked like a gigantic castle with walls and towers. Here they remained in the burning heat until the sun began to sink once more, and then went on again, leaving some of the bearers behind them, because there was no longer water for so many. There the great men sat in patient resignation and watched them go, they who knew that having little or no

water, few of them could hope to see their homes again. Still, so great was their dread of the Ghost-priests, that they never dared to murmur, or to ask that any of the store of water should be given to them, they who were but cattle to be used until they died.

The second night's journey was like the first, for this desert never changed its aspect, and on the following morning they halted beneath another pile of fantastic, sand-burnished rocks, from some of which hung salt like icicles. Here one of the bearers who had been denied water as a punishment for laziness, although in truth he was sick, began to suck the salt-icicles. Suddenly he went raving mad, and rushing with a knife at Eddo, Pani, and Hana where they sat under their cane umbrellas that, for the sake of coolness, were damped with this precious water, he tried to kill them.

Then as they saw the knife gleaming, all their imperturbable calm departed from these dwarfs. They squeaked in terror with thin voices as rats squeak; they rolled upon the ground yelling to the slaves to save them from a "red death." The man was seized and, though he fought with all his giant strength, held down and choked in the sand. Once, however, he twisted his head free, howling a curse at them. Also he managed to hurl his knife at Eddo, and the point of it scratched him on the hand, causing the pale blood to flow, a sight at which Eddo and the other priests broke into tears and lamentations, that continued long after the Umkulu was dead.

"Why are they such cowards?" asked Rachel, dreamily, for she had not seen the murder of the slave, and thought that Eddo had only scratched himself.

"Because they fear the sight of blood, Zoola," answered Noie, "which is a very evil omen to them. Death they do not fear who are already almost ghosts,

but if it is a red death, their souls are spilt with their life, or so they believe."

Towards noon that day the sky banked up with lurid-coloured clouds; the sun which should have shone so hotly, went out, and a hush that was almost fearful in its heat and intensity, fell upon the desert. The Umkulu bearers became disturbed, and gathered together into knots, talking in low tones. Eddo and his brother priests who, either because of the adventure of the morning or the oppressive air, could not sleep, as was usual with them, were also disturbed. They crept from beneath their umbrellas which, as the sun had vanished, were of no use to them, and stood together staring at the salty plain, which under that leaden and lowering sky looked white as snow, and at the brooding clouds above. They even sent for their bowls to read in them pictures of what was about to happen, but there was no dew left, so these could not be used.

Then they consulted with the captains of the bearers, who told them what no magic was needed to guess—that a mighty storm was gathering, and that if it overtook them in the desert, they would be buried beneath the drifting sand. Now this was a "white death" which the dwarfs did not seem to desire, so they ordered an instant departure, instead of delaying the start until sunset, as they had intended, for then, if all went well, they would have arrived at their homes by dawn, and not in the middle of the night. So the litters were made ready, and they went forward through the overpowering heat, that caused the bearers to hang out their tongues and reel as they walked.

Towards evening the storm began to stir. Little wandering puffs of wind blew upon them and died away, and lightnings flickered intermittently. Then a hot breeze sprang up that gradually increased in strength until the sand rolled and rippled before it, now one way and now another, for this breeze seemed to blow in turn from every quarter of the heavens.

Suddenly, however, after trying them all, it settled in the west, and drove straight into their faces with ever-increasing force. Now Eddo thrust out his head between the curtains of his litter and called to the bearers to hurry, as they had but a little distance of desert left to pass, after which came the grass country where there would be no danger from the sand. They heard and obeyed, changing the pole gangs frequently, as those who carried the litters became exhausted.

But the storm was quicker than they ; it burst upon them while they were still in the waste, though not in its full strength. Then the darkness came, utter darkness, for no moon or stars could be seen, and salt and sand drove down on them like hail. Through it all, the bearers fought on, though how they found their way Noie, who was watching them, could not guess, since no landmarks were left to guide them. They fought on, blinded, choked with the salt sand that drove into their eyes and lungs, till man after man, they fell down and perished. Others took their places, and yet they fought on.

It must have been near to midnight when the company, or those who were left of them, staggered to the edge of that dreadful wilderness which was but a vast plain of stone and sand, bordered on the west as on the east by slopes of fertile soil. For a while the fierce tempest lifted a little, and the light of the stars which struggled through breaks in the clouds showed that they were marching down a steep descent of grassland. Thus they went on for several more hours, till at length the bearers of the litter in which were Rachel and Noie, who for a long time had been staggering to and fro like drunken men, came to a halt, and litter and all, sank to the ground utterly exhausted.

Rachel and Noie disentangled themselves from the litter, for they were unhurt, and stood by it, not knowing where to go, till presently two other litters

containing the priests came up, for the third had been abandoned, and its occupant crowded in with Eddo. Now a great clamour arose in the darkness, the priests hissing commands to the surviving bearers to take up the litter and proceed. But great as was their strength, this the poor men could not do. There they lay upon the ground answering that Eddo might curse them if he wished, or even kill them as their brothers had been killed, but they were unable to stir another step until they had rested and drunk. Where they were, there they must lie until rain fell. Then the priests wished Rachel to enter one of their litters, leaving Noie to walk, which they were afraid to do themselves. But when she understood, Rachel cut the matter short by answering,

"Not so, I will walk," and picking up the spear of one of the fallen Umkulu to serve as a staff, she took Noie by the hand and started forward down the hill.

One of the priests clasped her robe to draw her back, but she turned on him with the spear, whereon he shrank back into his litter like a snail into his shell and left her alone. So following the steep path they marched on, and after them came the two litters with the priests, carried by all the bearers who could still stand, for these old men weighed no more than children. From far below them rose a mighty sound as of an angry sea.

"What is that noise?" called Rachel into the ear of Noie, for the gale was rising again.

"The sound of wind in the forest where the Tree-folk dwell," she answered.

Then the dawn broke, an awful, blood-red dawn, and by degrees they saw. Beneath them ran a shallow river, and beyond it, stretching for league upon league farther than the eye could see, lay the mighty forest whereof the trees soared two hundred feet or more into the air; the dark illimitable forest that rolled as the sea rolls beneath the pressure of the gale, and indeed,

seen from above, looked like a green and tossing ocean. At the sight of the water Rachel and Noie began to run towards it hand in hand, for they were parched with thirst whose mouths were full of the salt dust of the desert. The bearers of the litters in which were the three priests ran also, paying no heed to the cries of the dwarfs within. At length it was reached, and throwing themselves down they drank until that raging thirst of theirs was satisfied; even Eddo and his companions crawled out of their litters and drank. Then having washed their hands and faces in the cool water, they forded the fleet stream, and, filled with a new life, followed the road that ran beyond towards the forest. Scarcely had they set foot upon the farther bank when the heart of the tempest, which had been eddying round them all night long, burst over them in its fury. The lightnings blazed, the thunder rolled, and the wild wind grew to a hurricane, so fierce that the litters in which were Eddo, Pani, and Hana were torn from the grasp of the bearers and rolled upon the ground. From the wreck of them, for they were but frail things, the little grey priests emerged trembling, or rather were dragged by the hands of their giant bearers, to whom they clung as a frightened infant clings to its mother. Rachel saw them and laughed.

"Look at the Masters of Magic!" she cried to Noie, "those who kill with a curse, those who rule the Ghosts," and she pointed to the tiny, contemptible figures with fluttering robes being dragged along by those giants whom but a little while before they had threatened with death.

"I see them," answered Noie into her ear. "Their spirits are strong when they are at peace, but in trouble they fear doom more than others. Now, if I were those Umkulu, I would make an end of them while they can."

But these great, patient men did otherwise;

indeed, when the dwarfs, worn out and bewildered by the hurricane, could walk no more, they took them up and carried them as a woman carries a babe.

Now they were passing a belt of open land between the river and the forest in which terrified mobs of cattle rushed to and fro, while their herds, slave-men of large size like the Umkulu, tried to drive them to some place where they would be safe from the tempest. In this belt also grew broad fields of grain, which furnished food for the Tree-folk. At last they came to the confines of the forest, and Rachel, looking round her with wondering eyes, saw at the foot of each great tree a tiny hut shaped like a tent, and in front of the hut a dwarf seated on the ground staring into a bowl of water, and beating his breast with his hands.

"What do they?" she asked of Noie.

"They strive to read their fates, Lady, and weep because the wind ripples the dew in their bowls, so that they can see nothing, and cannot be sure whether their tree will stand or fall. Follow me, follow me; I know the way, here we are not safe."

The hurricane was at its height; the huge trees about them rocked and bent like reeds, great boughs came crashing down; one of them fell upon a praying dwarf and crushed him to a pulp. Those around him saw it and uttered a wild shrill scream; Eddo, Pani, and Hana saw it and screamed also, in the arms of their bearers, for this sight of blood was terrible to them. The forest was alive with the voices of the storm, it seemed to howl and groan, and the lightnings illumined its gloomy aisles. The grandeur and the fearfulness of the scene excited Rachel; she waved the spear she carried, and began to laugh in the wild fashion of her madness, so that even the grey dwarfs, seated each at the foot of his tree, ceased from his prayers to glance at her askance.

On they went, expecting death at every step, but always escaping it, until they reached a wide clearing

in the forest. In the centre of this clearing grew a tree more huge than any that Rachel had ever dreamed of, the bole of it, that sprang a hundred feet without a branch, was thicker than Dingaan's Great Hut, and its topmost boughs were lost in the scudding clouds. In front of this tree was gathered a multitude of people, men, women, and children, all dwarfs, and all of them on their knees engaged in prayer. At its bole, by a tent-shaped house, stood a little figure, a woman whose long grey hair streamed upon the wind.

"The Mother of the Trees," cried Noie through the screaming gale. "Come to her, she will shelter us," and she gripped Rachel's arm to lead her forward.

Scarcely had they gone a step when the lightning blazed above them fearfully, and with it came an awful rush of wind. Perhaps that flash fell upon the tree, or perhaps the wind snapped its roots. At least its mighty trunk burst in twain, and with a crash that for a moment seemed to master even the roar of the volleying thunder, down it came to earth. Two huge limbs fell on either side of Rachel and Noie, but they were not touched. A bough struck the Umkulu slave who was carrying Eddo, and swept off his head, leaving the dwarf unharmed. Another bough fell upon Pani and his bearer, and buried them in the earth beneath its bulk, so that they were never seen again. As it chanced the most of the worshippers were beyond the reach of the falling branches, but some of these that were torn loose in the fall, or shattered by the lightning, the wind caught and hurled among them, slaying several and wounding others.

In ten seconds the catastrophe had come and gone, the Queen-Tree that had ruled the forest for a thousand years was down, a stack of green leaves, through which the shattered branches showed like bones, and a prostrate, splintered trunk. The shock threw Noie and Rachel to the ground, but Rachel, rising swiftly, pulled

Noie to her feet after her; then, acting upon some impulse, leapt forward, and climbing on to the trunk where it forked, ran down it till she almost reached its base, and stood there against the great shield of earth that had been torn up with the roots. After that last fearful outburst a stillness fell, the storm seemed to have exhausted itself, at any rate for a while. Rachel was able to get her breath and look about her.

All around were lines of enormous trees, solemn aisles that seemed to lead up to the Queen of the Trees, and down these aisles, piercing the shadows cast by the interlacing branches overhead, shone the lights of that lurid morning. Rachel saw, and something struggled in the darkness of her brain, as the light struggled in the darkness of the forest aisles. She remembered—oh! what was it she remembered? Now she knew. It was the dream she had dreamed upon the island in the river, years and years ago, a dream of such trees as these, and of little grey people like to these, and of the boy, Richard, grown to manhood, lashed to the trunk of one of the trees. What had happened to her? She could recall nothing since she saw the body of Richard upon its bier in the kraal Mafooti.

But this was not the kraal Mafooti, nor had Noie, who stood at her side, been with her there, Noie, who had gone on an embassy to her father's folk, the dwarf people. Ah! these people were dwarfs. Look at them running to and fro screaming like little monkeys. She must have been dreaming a long, bad dream, whereof the pictures had escaped her. Doubtless she was still dreaming and presently would awake. Well, the torment had gone out of it, and the fear, only the wonder remained. She would stand still and see what happened. Something was happening now. A little thin hand appeared, gripping the rough bark at the side of the fallen tree.

She peeped over the swell of it and saw an old dwarf woman with long white hair, whose feet were set in a cleft of the shattered bole, and who hung to it as an ape hangs. Beneath her to the ground was a fall of full thirty feet, for the base of the bole was held high up by the roots, so that the little woman's hair hung down straight towards the ground, whither she must presently fall and be killed. Rachel wondered how she had come there, if she had clung to the trunk when it fell, or been thrown up by the shock, or lifted by a bough. Next she wondered how long it would be before she was obliged to leave go, and whether her white head or her back would first strike the earth all that depth beneath. Then it occurred to her that she might be saved.

"Hold my feet," she said to Noie, who had followed her along the trunk, speaking in her own natural voice, at the sound of which Noie looked at her in joyful wonder. "Hold my feet, I think I can reach that old woman," and without waiting for an answer she laid herself down upon the bole, her body hanging over the curve of it.

Now Noie saw her purpose, and seating herself with her heels set against the roughness of the bark, grasped her by the ankles. Supporting some of her weight on one hand, with the other Rachel reached downwards all the length of her long arm, and just as the grasp of the old woman below was slackening, contrived to grip her by the wrist. The dwarf swung loose, hanging in the air, but she was very light, of the weight of a five-year old child, perhaps, no more, and Rachel was very strong. With an effort she lifted her up till the monkey-like fingers gripped the rough bark again. Another effort and the little body was resting on the round of the tree, one more and she was beside her.

Now Rachel rose to her feet again and laughed, but it was not the mad laughter that had scared

Ishmael and the Zulus ; it was her own laughter, that of a healthy, cultured woman.

The little creature, crouching on hands and knees at Rachel's feet, lifted her head and stared with her round eyes. At that moment, too, the sun broke out, and its rays, shining where they had never shone for ages, fell upon Rachel, upon her bright hair, and the white robes in which the dwarfs had clothed her, and the gleaming spear in her hand, causing her to look like some ancient statue of a goddess upon a temple roof.

"Who art thou," said the dwarf woman in the hissing voice of her race, "thou Beautiful One ? I know ! I know ! Thou art that Inkosazana of the Zulus of whom we have had many visions, she for whom I sent. But the Inkosazana was mad, she had lost her Spirit ; it has been seen here. Beautiful One, *thou* art not mad."

"What does she say, Noie ? " asked Rachel. "I can only understand some words."

Noie told her, and Rachel hid her eyes in her hand. Presently she let it fall, saying :

"She is right. I lost my Spirit for a while ; it went away with another Spirit. But I think that I have found it again. Tell her, Noie, that I have travelled far to seek my Spirit, and that I have found it again."

Noie, who could scarcely take her eyes from Rachel's face, obeyed, but the old woman hardly seemed to heed her words ; a grief had got hold of her. She rocked herself to and fro like a monkey that has lost its young, and cried out :

"My tree has fallen, the tree of my House, which stood from the beginning of the world, has fallen, but that of Eddo still stands," and she pointed to another giant of the forest that soared up, unharmed, at a little distance. "Nya's tree has fallen—Eddo's tree still stands. His magic has prevailed against me, his magic has prevailed against me ! "

As she spoke a man appeared scrambling along the bole towards them; it was Eddo himself. His round eyes shone, on his pale face there was a look of triumph, for whoever might be lost, the danger had passed him by.

"Nya," he piped, tapping her on the shoulder, "thy Ghost has deserted thee, old woman, thy tree is down. See, I spit upon it," and he did so. "Thou art no longer Mother of the Trees, thou art only the old woman Nya. The Ghost people, the Dream people, the little Grey people, have a new queen, and I am her minister, for I rule her Spirit. Yonder she stands," and he pointed at the tall and glittering Rachel. "Now, thou new-born Mother of the Trees, who wast the Inkosazana of the Zulus, obey me. Give death to this old woman, the Red Death, that her spirit may be spilt with her blood, and lost for ever. Give it to her with that spear in thy hand, while I hide my eyes, and reign thou in her place through me," and he bowed his head and waited.

"Not the Red Death, not the Red Death," wailed Nya. "Give me the White Death and save my soul, Beautiful One, and in return I will give thee something that thou desirest, who am still the wisest of them all, although my Tree is down."

Noie whispered for a while in Rachel's ear. Then while all the dwarf people gathered beneath them, watching, Rachel bent forward and putting her arms about the trembling creature, lifted her up as though she were a child, and held her to her bosom.

"Mother," she said, "I give thee no death, red or white, I give thee love. Thy tree is down, sit thou in my shadow and be safe. On him who harms thee"—and she looked at Eddo—"on him shall the Red Death fall."

CHAPTER XX

THE MOTHER OF THE TREES

When Eddo understood these words he lifted his head and stared at Rachel amazed.

"This is thy doing, Bastard," he said savagely, addressing Noie, who had translated them. "I have felt thee fighting against me for long, and now thou causest this Inkosazana to defy me. It was thou who didst work upon that old woman, thine aunt, to command that the white witch should be brought hither, and because as yet I dared not disobey, I made a terrible journey to bring her. Yes, and I did this gladly, for when my eyes fell upon her, there in the town of Dingaan, I saw that she was great and beautiful, but that her Spirit had gone, and I knew that I could make her mouth to speak my words, and her pure eyes to see things that are denied to mine, even the future as, when I bade her, she saw it yonder in the court of Dingaan. But now it seems that her Spirit has returned to her, so that there is no room for mine in her heart, and she speaks her own words, not my words. And thou hast done this thing, O Bastard."

"Perhaps," answered Noie unconcernedly.

"Thou thinkest," went on Eddo, in his fury beating the bole on which he sat, "thou thinkest to protect that old hag, Nya, because her blood runs in thee. But, fool, it is in vain, for her tree is down, her tree is down, and as its leaves wither, and its sap dries up, so must she wither and her blood dry up until

she dies, she who thought to live on for many years."

"What does that matter?" asked Noie, "seeing that then she will only join the great company of the ghosts with whom she longs to be, and return with them to torment thee, Eddo, until thou, too, art one of them, and lookest on the face of Judgment."

"Thou thinkest," screamed the dwarf, ignoring this ominous suggestion, "thou thinkest, when she is gone, to be queen in her place, or to rule as high priestess through this White One."

"If I do, that will be a bad hour for thee, Eddo," replied Noie.

"It shall not be, woman. No bastard shall reign here as Mother of the Trees while the nations round cringe before her feet. I have spells; I have poisons; I have slaves who can shoot with arrows."

"Then use them if thou canst, thou evil-doer," said Noie, contemptuously.

"Aye, I will use them all, and not on thee only, but on that white witch whom thou lovest. She shall never pass living from this land that is ringed in by the desert and the forest. She shall choose me to reign through her as her high priest, or she shall die—die miserably. For a little while that old hag, Nya, may protect her with her wisdom, but when she passes, as she must, and quickly, for I will light fires beneath this fallen tree of hers, then I tell thee the Beautiful One shall choose between my rule and doom."

Now Noie would hear no more.

"Dog," she cried, "filthy night-bird, darest thou speak thus of the Inkosazana? Another word and I will offer that heart of thine to the sun thou hatest," and snatching the spear from Rachel's hand, she charged at him, holding it aloft.

Eddo saw her come. With a scream of fear he leapt to his feet, and ran swiftly along the bole till he reached the mass of the fallen branches. Into these he

sprang, swinging himself from bough to bough like an ape until he vanished amongst the dark green foliage. Then having quite lost sight of him, Noie returned laughing to Rachel, by whom stood the old Mother of the Trees who had slid from her arms, and gave her back the spear, saying in the dwarf language,

"This Eddo speaks great words, but he is also a great coward."

"Yes, yes," answered the old woman, "he is a great coward, because like all our folk he fears the Red Death, but, child, I tell thee he is terrible. He hates me because I rule through the white art, not the black, but while my tree stood he must obey me, and I was safe. Now it is down, and he may kill me if he can, according to the custom of my land, and set up another to be queen, she at whose feet my tree bowed itself and fell by the will of the Heavens, and whom, therefore, the people will accept. Through her he will wield all the power of the Ghost-kings, over whom no man may rule but a woman only. Come, Child, and thou, White One, come also. I know where we may hide. Lady, the power that was mine is thine; protect me till I die, and in payment I will give thee whatever thy heart desires."

"I ask no payment," Rachel answered wearily, when she understood the words, "and I think that it is I who need protection from that wicked dwarf."

Then guided by Nya, who clung to Rachel's hand, they walked down the bole of the tree and along a great branch, till at length they reached a place whence they could climb to the ground. Before they were clear of the boughs the dethroned Mother, from whose round eyes the tears fell, turned and kissed the bark of one of them, wailing aloud,

"Farewell, thou mighty one, under whose shade I, and the queens of my race before me, have dreamed for centuries. Thou art fallen beneath the stroke of heaven, and great was thy fall, and I am fallen

with thee. Save me from the Red Death, O Spirit of my tree, that in the land of ghosts I still may sleep beneath thy shade for ever."

Then she ran to the very point of the tree and broke off its topmost twig, which was covered with narrow and shining green leaves, and holding it in her hand, returned to Rachel.

"I will plant it," she said, "and perchance it will grow to be the house of queens unborn. Come now, come," and she turned her face towards the forest.

The thunder had rolled away, and from time to time the sun shone fiercely, so fiercely that, unable to bear its rays, all the dwarfs who were gathered about the fallen tree had retreated into the shadow of the other trees around the open space. There they stood and sat watching the three of them go by. Men, women, and children, they all watched, and Rachel they saluted with their raised hands, but to her who had been their mother for unknown years, they did no reverence. Only one hideous little man ran up to her and called out,

"Thou didst punish me once, old woman, now why should I not kill thee in payment? Thy tree is down at last."

Nya looked at him sadly, and answered,

"I remember. Thou shouldst have died, for thy sin was great, but I laid a lesser burden on thee. Man, thou canst not kill me yet; my tree is down, but it is not dead."

She held up the green bough in her hand and looked at him from beneath it, then went on slowly, "Man, my wisdom remains within me, and I tell thee that before I die thou shalt die, and not as thou desirest. Remember my words, people of the Ghosts."

Then she walked on with the others, leaving the dwarf staring after her with a face wherein hate struggled with fear.

"Thou liest," he screamed after her, "thy power is gone with thy tree."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when they heard a crash which caused them to look round. A bough, broken by the storm, had fallen from on high. It had fallen on to the head of the dwarf, and there he lay crushed and dead.

"Ah!" piped the other dwarfs, pointing towards the corpse with their fingers, and closing their eyes to shut out the sight of blood, "ah! Nya is right, she still has power. Those who would kill her must wait till her tree dies."

Taking no heed of what had happened, Nya walked on into the forest. For a while Rachel noted the little huts built, each of them, at the foot of a tree. There were hundreds of these huts that they could see, showing that the people were many, but by degrees they grew fewer, only one was visible here and there, set beneath some particularly vigorous and handsome timber. At last they ceased altogether; they had passed through that city, the strangest city in the world.

Trees—everywhere trees, hundreds of trees, tens of thousands of trees soaring up to heaven, making a canopy of their interlacing boughs, shutting out the light so that beneath them was a deep oppressive gloom. There was silence also, for if any beasts or birds dwelt there the hurricane had scared them away, silence, only broken from time to time by the crash of some giant of the forest, that, its length of days fulfilled at last, sank suddenly to ruin, to be buried in a tomb of brushwood whence in due course its successor would arise.

"Another life gone," said the old woman, Nya, flitting before them like a little grey ghost, every time that this weird sound struck upon their ears; "whose was it, I wonder? I will look in my bowl, I will look in my bowl."

For, as Rachel discovered afterwards, these people believed that the spirit of each tree of the forest is attached to the spirit of a human being, although that being may dwell in other lands, far away, which dies when the tree dies, sometimes slowly by disease, and sometimes in swift collapse, so that they pass together into the world of ghosts.

On they flitted through the gloom, on for mile after mile. Although the leaf-strewn ground showed no traces of it, evidently they were following some kind of path, for no fallen trunks barred their progress, nor were there any creepers or brushwood, although to right and left of them all these could be seen in plenty. At last, quite of a sudden, for the bole of a tree at the end of the path had hidden it from them, they came upon a clearing in the forest. It seemed to be a natural, or, at any rate, a very ancient clearing, since in it no stumps were visible, nor any scrub, or creepers, only tall grass and flowering plants. In the centre of this place, covering a quarter of it, perhaps, was a vast circular wall, fifty feet or more in height, and clothed with ferns. This wall, they noted, was built of huge blocks of stone, so huge indeed that it seemed wonderful that they could have been moved by human beings. At the sight of that marvellous wall, Rachel and Noie halted involuntarily, and Noie asked,

"Who made it, Mother?"

"The giants who lived when the world was young. Can our hands lift such stones?" Nya answered, as bending down, she thrust the top shoot from her fallen tree deep into the humid soil, then added: "On, child, there is danger here."

As she spoke something hissed through the air just above her head, and stuck fast in the bark of a sapling. Noie sprang forward and plucked it out. It was a little reed, feathered with grasses, and having a sharp ivory point, smeared with some green substance.

"Touch it not," cried Nya, "it is deadly poison. Eddo's work, Eddo's work! but my hour is not yet. Into the open before another comes."

So they ran forward, all three of them, seeing and hearing nothing of the shooter of the arrow. As they approached the titanic wall they saw that it enclosed a mound, on the top of which mound grew a cedar-like tree with branches so wide that they seemed to overshadow half of the enclosure. There were no gates to this wall, but while they wondered how it could be entered, Nya led them to a kind of cleft in its stones, not more than two feet in width, across which cleft were stretched strings of plaited grass. She pressed herself against them, breaking them, and walked forward, followed by Rachel and Noie. Suddenly they heard a noise above them and looking up, saw white-robed dwarfs perched upon the stones of the cleft, holding bent bows in their hands, whereof the arrows were pointed at their breasts. Nya halted, beckoning to them, whereon, recognising her, they dropped the arrows into the little quivers which they wore, and scrambled off, whither Rachel could not see.

"These are the guardians of the Temple that cannot either speak or hear, who were summoned by the breaking of the thread," said Nya, and went forward again.

Now to the right, and now to the left, ran the narrow path that wound its way in the thickness of the mighty wall, which towered so high above them that they walked almost in darkness, and at each turn of it were recesses, and above these projecting stones, where archers could stand for its defence. At length this path ended in a *cul-de-sac*, for in front of them was nothing but blank masonry. Whilst Rachel and Noie stared at it wondering whither they should go now, a large stone in this wall turned, leaving a narrow doorway through which they passed,

whereon it shut again behind them, though by what machinery they could not see.

Thus they passed through the wall, emerging, however, at a different point in its circumference to that at which they had entered. In the centre of the enclosure rose the hill of earth that they had seen from without, which evidently was kept free from weeds and swept, and on its crest grew the huge cedar-like tree, the Tree of the Tribe. Between the base of this hill and the foot of the wall was a wide ring of level ground, also swept and weeded, and on this space, neatly arranged in lines, were hundreds of little hillocks that resembled ant-heaps.

"The burying-place of the Ghost-priests, Lady," said Nya, nodding at the hillocks. "Soon my bones will be added to them."

Walking across this strange cemetery they came to the foot of the mound that was entirely overshadowed by the cedar above, from the outspread limbs of which hung long grey moss, that swayed ceaselessly in the wind. Here dwarfs appeared from right and left, the same whom they had seen within the thickness of the wall, or others like to them, some male and some female; melancholy-eyed little creatures who bowed to Nya, and looked with fear and wonder at the tall white Rachel. Evidently they were all of them deaf-mutes, for they made signs to Nya, who answered them with other signs, the purport of which seemed to sadden and disturb them greatly.

"They have seen the fall of my tree in their bowls," explained Nya to Noie, "and ask me if it is a true vision. I tell them that I am come here to die and that is why they are sad. This is the place of dying of all the Ghost-priests, whence they pass into the world of spirits, and here no blood may be shed, no, not that of the most wicked evil-doer. If any one of the family of the priests reaches this place living, the glory of the White Death is won. Follow and see."

So they followed her up the mound, past what looked like the entrance to a cave, until they reached a low fence of reeds whereof the gate stood open.

"The gate is open, but enter not there," whispered the old Mother of the Trees, "for those who enter there live not long. Look, Lady, look."

Rachel peered through the gate, but so dense was the gloom in that holy spot, that at first she could only see the enormous red bole of the cedar, and the ghostly, moss-clad branches which sprang from it at no great height above the ground. Presently, however, her eyes, grown accustomed to the light, distinguished several little white-robed figures seated upon the earth at some distance from the trunk staring into vessels of wood which were placed before them. These figures appeared to be those of both men and women, while one was that of a child. Even as they watched, the figure nearest to them fell forward over its bowl and lay quite still, whereon those around it set up a feeble, piping cry, that yet had in it a note of gladness. The dwarf-mutes who had accompanied them, and who alone seemed to have a right of entry into this sad place, ran forward and looked. Then very gently they lifted up the fallen figure and bore it out. As it was carried past them Rachel noted that it was the body of quite a young woman, whose little face, wasted to nothing, still looked sweet and gentle.

"Was she ill?" asked Rachel in an awed voice.

"Perhaps," answered the Mother, shaking her grey head, "or perhaps she was very unhappy, and came here to die. What does it matter? She is happy now."

"Ask her, Noie, if all must die who sit beneath that tree," said Rachel.

"Aye," answered Nya, "all save these dumb people who have been priests of the Tree from generation to generation. To touch its stem is to perish

soon or late, for it is the Tree of Life and Death, and in it dwells the Spirit of the whole race."

"What then would happen if it fell down, or was destroyed like your tree, Mother?"

"Then the race would perish also," answered Nya, "since their Spirit would lack a home and depart to the world of Ghosts, whither they must follow. When it dies of old age, if it should ever die, then the race will die with it."

"And if someone should cut it down, Mother, what then?"

Now when Noie translated these words to her, the face of the old queen was filled with horror, and as her face was, so was Noie's face.

"White Maiden," she gasped, "speak not such wickedness lest the very thought of it should bring the curse upon us all. He who destroyed that tree would bring ruin upon this people. They would fly away, every one of them, far into the heart of the forest, and be seen no more by man. Moreover, he who did this evil thing would perish and pass down to vengeance among the ghosts, such vengeance as may not be spoken. Put that thought from thy mind, I pray thee, and let it never pass thy lips again."

"Do you believe all this, Noie?" asked Rachel in English with a smile.

"Yes, Zoola," answered Noie, shuddering, "for it is true. My father told me of it, and of what happened once to some wild men who broke into the sanctuary, and shot arrows at the Tree. No, no, I will not tell the story; it is dreadful."

"Yet it must be foolishness, Noie, for how can a tree have power over the lives of men?"

"I do not know, but it has, it has! If I were but to cast a stone at it, I should be dead in a day, and so would you—yes, even you—nothing could save you. Oh!" she went on earnestly, "swear to me,

Sister, that you will never so much as touch that tree; I pray you, swear."

So Rachel swore, to please her, for she was tired of this tree and its powers.

Then they went down the hill again, till they came to the mouth of the cave.

"Enter, Lady," Nya said, "for this must be thy home a while until thou goest hence to rule as Mother of the Trees after me, or, if it pleases thee better, up yonder to die."

They went into the cave, having no choice. It was a great place lit dimly by the outer light, and farther down its length with lamps. Looking round her, Rachel saw that its roof was supported by white columns which she knew to be stalactites, for as a child she had seen their like. At the end of it, where the lamps burned and a fountain bubbled from the ground, rose a very large column shaped like the trunk of a tree, with branches at the top that looked like the boughs of a tree. Gazing at it Rachel understood why these dwarfs, or some ancient people before them, had chosen this cave as their temple.

"The ghost Tree of my race," said old Nya, pointing to it, "the only tree that never falls, the Tree that lives and grows for ever. Yes, it grows, for it is larger now than when my mother was a child."

As they drew near to this wondrous and ghostly looking object Rachel saw piled around and beyond it many precious things. There was gold in dust and heaps, and rings and nuggets; there were shining stones, red and green and white, that she knew were jewels; there were tusks of ivory and carvings in ivory; there were karosses and furs mouldering to decay; there were grotesque gods, fetishes of wood and stone.

"Offerings," said Nya, "which all the nations that live in darkness bring to the Mother of the Trees, and the priests of the Cave. Costly things which

they value, but we value them not, who prize power and wisdom only. Yes, yes, costly things which they give to the Mother of the Trees, the fools without a spirit, when they come here to ask her oracle. Look, there are some of the gifts which were sent by Dingaan of the Zulus in payment for the oracle of his death. Thou broughtest them, Noie, my child."

"Yes," answered Noie, "I brought them, and the Inkosazana here, she delivered the oracle. Eddo gave her the bowl, and she saw pictures in the bowl and showed them to Dingaan."

"Nay, nay," said the old woman testily, "it was I who saw the pictures, and I showed them to Eddo and to this white virgin. You cannot understand, but it was so, it was so. Eddo's gift of vision is small, mine is great. None have ever had it as I have it, and that is why Eddo and the others have suffered my tree to live so long, because the light of my wisdom has shone about their heads and spoken through their tongues, and when I am gone they will seek and find it not. In thee they might have found it, Maiden, had thy heart remained empty, but now it is full again and what room is there for wisdom such as ours?—the wisdom of the ghosts, not the wisdom of life and love and beating hearts."

Noie translated the words, but Rachel seemed to take no heed of them.

"Dingaan?" she asked. "Is Dingaan dead? He was well enough when—when Richard came to Zululand, and since then I have seen nothing of him. How did he die?"

"He did not die, Zoola," answered Noie, "though I think that ere long he will die, for you told him so. It was you who died for a while, not Dingaan. By-and-bye you shall learn all that story. Now you are very weary and must rest."

"Yes," said Rachel with a sob, "I think I died when Richard died, but now I seem to have come to

life again—that is the worst of it. Oh! Noie, Noie, why did you not let me remain dead, instead of bringing me to life again in this dreadful place?"

"Because it was otherwise fated, Sister," replied Noie. "No, do not begin to laugh and cry; it was otherwise fated," and bending down she whispered something into Nya's ear.

The old dwarf nodded, then, taking Rachel by the hand, led her to where some skins were spread upon the floor.

"Lie down," she said, "and rest. Rest, beautiful White One, and wake up to eat and be strong again," and she gazed into Rachel's eyes as Eddo had done when the fits of wild laughter were on her, singing something as she gazed.

While she sang the madness that was gathering there again went out of Rachel's eyes, the lids closed over them, and presently they were fast shut in sleep, nor did she open them again for many hours.

Rachel awoke and sat up looking round her wonderingly. Then by the dim light of the lamps she saw Noie seated at her side, and the old dwarf-woman, who was called Mother of the Trees, squatted at a little distance watching them both—and remembered.

"Thou hast had happy dreams, Lady, and thou art well again, is it not so?" queried Nya.

"Aye, Mother," she answered, "too happy, for they make my waking the more sad. And I am well, I who desire to die."

"Then go up through the open gate which thou sawest not so long ago, and satisfy thy desire, as it is easy to do," replied Nya grimly. "Nay," she added in a changed voice, "go not up, thou art too young and fair, the blood runs too red in those blue veins of thine. What hast thou to do with ghosts and death, and the darkness of the trees, thou child of the air and sunshine? Death for the dwarf-folk,

death for the dealers in dreams, death for the death-lovers, but for thee life—life."

"Tell her, Noie," said Rachel, "that my mother, who was fore-sighted, always said that I should live out my days, and I fear that it is true, who must live them out alone."

"Yes, yes, she was right, that mother of thine," answered Nya, "and for the rest, who knows? But thou art hungry, eat; afterwards we will talk," and she pointed to a stool upon which was food.

Rachel tasted and found it very good, a kind of porridge, made of she knew not what, and with it forest fruits, but no flesh. So she ate heartily, and Noie ate with her. Nya ate also, but only a very little.

"Why should I trouble to eat?" she said, "I to whom death draws near?"

When they had finished eating, at some signal which Rachel did not perceive, mutes came in who bore away the fragments of the meal. After they had gone the three women washed themselves in the water of the fountain. Then Noie combed out Rachel's golden hair, and clothed her again in her robe of silken fur that she had cleansed, throwing over it a mantle of snowy white fibre, such as the dwarfs wove into cloth, which she and Nya had made ready while Rachel slept.

As Noie put it about her mistress and stepped back to see how it became her beauty, two of the dwarf-mutes appeared creeping up the cave, and squatting down before Nya began to make signs to her.

"What is it?" asked Rachel nervously.

"Eddo is without," answered the Mother, "and would speak with us."

"I fear Eddo and will not go," exclaimed Rachel.

"Nay, have no fear, Maiden, for here he can not harm thee or any of us; it is the place of sanctuary. Come, let us see this priest; perhaps we may learn something from him."

CHAPTER XXI

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

Nya led the way down the cave, followed by Rachel and Noie. Squatted in its entrance, so as to be out of reach of the rays of the sun, sat Eddo, looking like a malevolent toad, and with him were Hana and some other priests. As Rachel approached they all rose and saluted, but to Nya and Noie they gave no salute. Only to Nya Eddo said:

"Why art thou not within the Fence, old woman?" and he pointed with his chin towards the place of death above. "Thy tree is down, and all last night we were hacking off its branches that it may dry up the sooner. It is time for thee to die."

"I die when my tree dies, not before, Priest," answered Nya. "I have still some work to do before I die, also I have planted my tree again in good soil, and it may grow."

"I saw," said Eddo; "it is without the wall there, but many a generation must go by before a new Mother sits beneath its shade. Well, die when it pleases you, it does not matter when, since thou art no more our Mother. Moreover, learn that all have deserted thee, save a very few, most of whom have just now passed within the Fence above that they may attend thee amongst the ghosts."

"I thank them," said Nya simply, "and in that world we will rule together."

"The rest," went on Eddo, "have turned against thee, having heard how thou didst bring one of us

to the Red Death yesterday by thy evil magic, him upon whom the bough fell."

"Who was it that strove to bring me to the Red Death before I reached the sanctuary? Who shot the poisoned arrow, Priest?"

"I do not know," answered Eddo, "but it seems that he shot badly for thou art still here. Now enough of thee, old woman. For many years we bore thy rule, which was always foolish, and sometimes bad, because we could not help it, for the tree of her who went before thee fell at thy feet, as thy tree has fallen at the feet of the White Virgin there. For long thou and I have struggled for the mastery, and now thou art dead and I have won, so be silent, old woman, and since that arrow missed thee, go hence in peace, for none need thee any more, who hast neither youth, nor comeliness, nor power."

"Aye," answered Nya, stung to fury by these insults, "I shall go hence in peace, but thou shalt not abide in peace, thou traitor, nor those who follow thee. When youth and comeliness fade then wisdom grows, and wisdom is power, Eddo, true power. I tell thee that last night I looked in my bowl and saw things concerning thee—aye, and all of our people, that are hid from thy eyes, terrible things, things that have not befallen since the Tree of the Tribe was a seed, and the Spirit of the Tribe came to dwell within it."

"Speak them, then," said Eddo, striving to hide the fear which showed through his round eyes.

"Nay, Priest, I speak them not. Live on and thou shalt discover them, thou and thy traitors. Well have I served you all for many years, mercy have I given to all, white magic have I practised and not black, none have died that I could save, none have suffered whom I could protect, no, not even the slave-peoples beneath our rule. All this have I done, knowing that ye plotted against me, knowing that

ye strove to kill my tree by spells, knowing what the end must be. It has come at last, as come it must, and I do not grieve. Fool, I knew that it would come, and I knew the manner of its coming. It was I who sent for this virgin queen whom ye would set up to rule over you, foreseeing that at her feet my tree would fall. The ghost of Seyapi, who is of my blood, Seyapi whom years ago ye drove away for no offence, to dwell in a strange land, told me of her and of this Noie, his daughter, and of the end of it all. So she came; thou didst not bring her as thou thoughtest, *I* brought her, and my tree fell at her feet as it was doomed to fall, and she saved me from the Red Death as she was doomed to do, giving me love, not hate, as I give her love not hate. For the rest ye shall see —all of you. I am finished—I am dead—but I live on elsewhere, and ye shall see."

Now Eddo would have answered, but the priest Hana, who appeared to be much frightened by Nya's words, plucked at his sleeve, whispering in his ear, and he was silent. Presently he spoke again, but to Rachel, bidding Noie translate:

"Thou White Maid," he said, "who wast called Princess of the Zulus, pay no heed to this old dotard, but listen to me. When thy Spirit wandered yonder, even then I saw the seeds of greatness in thee, and begged thee from the savage Dingaan. Also I and Pani, who is dead, and Hana, who lives, read by our magic that at thy feet the tree of Nya would fall, and that after her thou wast appointed to rule over us. All the Ghost-people read it also, and now they have named thee their Mother, and chosen thee a tree, a great tree, but young and strong, that shall stand for ages. Come forth, then, and take thy seat beneath that tree, and be our queen."

"Why should I come?" asked Rachel. "It seems that you dwarfs bring your queens to ill ends. Choose you another Mother."

"Inkosazana, we cannot if we would," answered Eddo, "for these matters are not in our hands, but in those of our Spirit. Hearken, we will deal well with thee; we will make thee great, and grow in thy greatness, for thou shalt give us of thy wisdom, that although thou knowest it not, thou hast above all other women. We weary of little things, we would rule the world. All the nations from sea to sea shall bow down before thee, and seek thine oracle. Thou shalt take their wealth, thou shalt drive them hither and thither as the wind drives clouds. Thou shalt make war, thou shalt ordain peace. At thy pleasure they shall rise up in life and lie down in death. Their kings shall cower before thee, their princes shall bring thee tribute, thou shalt reign a god."

"Until it shall please Eddo to bring thee to thine end, Lady, as it pleases him to bring me to mine," muttered Nya behind her. "Be not beguiled, Maiden; remain a woman and uncrowned, for so thou shalt find most joy."

"Thou meanest, Eddo," said Rachel, "that thou wilt rule and I do thy bidding. Noie, tell him that I will have none of it. When I came here a great sorrow had made me mad, and I knew nothing. Now I have found my Spirit again, and presently I go hence."

At this answer Eddo grew very angry.

"One thing I promise thee, Zoola," he said; "in the name of all the Ghost-people I promise it, that thou shalt not go hence alive. In this sanctuary thou art safe indeed, seated in the shadow of the Death-tree that is the Tree of Life, but soon or late a way will be found to draw thee hence, and then thou shalt learn who is the stronger—thou or Eddo—as the old woman behind thee has learned. Fare thee well for a while. I will tell the people that thou art weary and restest, and meanwhile I rule in thy name. Fare thee well, Inkosazana, till me meet without the wall,"

and he rose and went, accompanied by Hana and the other priests.

When he had gone a little way he turned, and pointing up the hill, screamed back to Nya:

"Go and look within the Fence, old hag. There thou wilt see the best of those that clung to thee, seeking for peace. Art thou a coward that thou lingerest behind them?"

"Nay, Eddo," she answered, "thou art the coward that hast driven them to death, because they are good and thou art evil. When my hour is ripe I join them, not before. Nor shalt thou abide here long behind me. One short day of triumph for thee, Eddo, and then night, black night for ever."

Eddo heard, and his yellow face grew white with rage, or fear. He stamped upon the ground, he shook his small fat fists, and spat out curses as a toad spits venom. Nya did not stay to listen to them, but walked up the cave and sat herself down upon her mat.

"Why does he hate thee so, Mother?" asked Rachel.

"Because those that are bad hate those that are good, Maiden. For many a year Eddo has sought to rule through me, and to work evil in the world, but I have not suffered it. He would abandon our secret, ancient faith, and reign a king, as Dingaan the Zulu reigns. He would send the slave-tribes out to war and conquer the nations, and build him a great house, and have many wives. But I held him fast, so that he could do few of these things. Therefore he plotted against me, but my magic was greater than his, and while my tree stood he could not prevail. At length it fell at thy feet, as he knew that it was doomed to fall, for all these things are fore-ordained, and at once he would have slain me by the Red Death, but thou didst protect me, and for that blessed be thou for ever."

"And why does he wish to make me Mother in thy place, Nya?"

"Because my tree fell at thy feet, and all the people demand it. Because he thinks that once the bond of the priesthood is tied between you, and his blood runs in thee, thy pure spirit will protect his spirit from its sins, and that thy wisdom, which he sees in thee, will make him greater than any of the Ghost-people that ever lived. Yet consent not, for afterwards if thou dost thwart him, he will find a way to bring down thy tree, and with it thy life, and set another to rule in thy place. Consent not, for know that here thou art safe from him."

"It may be so, Mother, but how can I dwell on in this dismal place? Already my heart is broken with its sorrows, and soon, like those poor folk, I should seek peace within the Fence."

"Tell me of those sorrows," said Nya gently. "Perhaps I do not know them all, and perhaps I could help thee."

So Rachel sat herself down also, and Noie, interpreting for her, told all her tale up to that point when she saw the body of Richard borne away, for after this she remembered nothing until she found herself standing upon the fallen tree in the land of the Ghost Kings. It was a long tale, and before ever she finished it night fell, but throughout its telling the old dwarf-woman said never a word, only watched Rachel's face with her kind, soft eyes. At last it was done, and she said:

"A sad story. Truly there is much evil in the world beyond the country of the Trees, for here at least we shed little blood. Now, Maiden, what is thy desire?"

"This is my desire," said Rachel, "to be joined again to him I love, whom Ishmael slew; yes, and to my father and mother also, whom the Zulus slew at the command of Ishmael."

"If they are all dead, how can that be, Maiden, unless thou seekest them in death? Pass within the Fence yonder, and let the poison of the Tree of the Tribe fall upon thee, and soon thou wilt find them."

"Nay, Mother, I may not, for it would be self-murder, and my faith knows few greater crimes."

"Then thou must wait till death finds thee, and that road may be very long."

"Already it is long, Mother, so long that I know not how to travel it, who am alone in the world without a friend save Noie here," and she began to weep.

"Not so. Thou hast another friend," and she laid her hand upon Rachel's heart, "though it is true that I may bide with thee but a little while."

After this they were all silent for a space, until Nya looked up at Rachel and asked suddenly:

"Art thou brave?"

"The Zulus and others thought so, Mother; but what can courage avail me now?"

"Courage of the body, nothing, Maiden; courage of the spirit much, perhaps. If thou sawest this lover of thine, and knew for certain that he lives on beneath the world awaiting thee, would it bring thee comfort?"

Rachel's breast heaved and her eyes sparkled with joy, as she answered:

"Comfort! What is there that could bring so much? But how can it be, Mother, seeing that the last gulf divides us, a gulf which mortals may not pass and live?"

"Thou sayest it; still I have great power, and thy spirit is white and clean. Perhaps I could despatch it across that gulf and call it back to earth again. Yet there are dangers, dangers to me of which I reck little, and dangers to thee. Whither I sent thee, there thou mightest bide."

"I care not if I bide there, Mother, if only it be with him! Oh! send me on this journey to his side, and living or dead I will bless thee."

Now Nya thought a while and answered :

" For thy sake I will try what I would try for none other who has breathed, or breathes, for thou didst save me from the Red Death at the hands of Eddo. Yes, I will try, but not yet—first thou must eat and rest. Obey, or I do nothing."

So Rachel ate, and afterwards, feeling drowsy, even slept a while, perhaps because she was still weary with her journeying and her new found mind needed repose, or perhaps because some drug had been mingled with her drink. When she awoke Nya led her to the mouth of the cave. There they stood awhile studying the stars. No breath of air stirred, and the silence was intense, only from time to time the sound of trees falling in the forest reached their ears. Sometimes it was quite soft as though a fleece of wool had been dropped to the earth, that was when the tree that died had grown miles and miles away from them ; and sometimes the crash was as that of sudden thunder, that was when the tree which died had grown near to them.

A sense of the mystery and wonder of the place and hour sank into Rachel's heart. The stars above, the mighty entombing forest, in which the trees fell unceasingly after their long centuries of life, the encircling wall, built perhaps by hands that had ceased from their labours hundreds of thousands of years before those trees began to grow ; the huge moss-clad cedar upon the mound beneath the shadow of whose branches day by day its worshippers gave up their breath, that immemorial cedar whereof, as they believed, the life was the life of the nation ; the wizened little witch-woman at her side with the seal of doom already set upon her brow and the stare of farewell in her eyes ; the sad, spiritual face of Noie who held her hand, the loving, faithful Noie, who in that light seemed half a thing of air ; the grey little dwarf-mutes who squatted on their mats staring at the ground,

or now and again passed down the hill from the Fence of Death above, bearing between them a body to its burial: all were mysterious, all were wonderful.

As she looked and listened, a new strength stirred in Rachel's heart. At first she had felt afraid, but now courage flowed into her, and it seemed to come from the old, old woman at her side, the mistress of mysteries, the mother of magic, in whom was gathered the wisdom of a hundred generations of this half human race.

"Look at the stars and the night," she was saying in her soft voice, "for soon thou shalt be beyond them all, and perchance thou shalt never see them more. Art thou fearful? If so, speak and we will not try this journey in search of one whom we may not find."

"No," answered Rachel; "but, Mother, whither go we?"

"We go to the Land of Death. Come, then, the moment is at hand. It is hard on midnight. See, yonder star stands above the holy Tree," and she pointed to a bright orb that hung almost over the topmost bough of the cedar, "it marks thy road and if thou wouldst pass it, now is the hour."

"Mother," asked Noie, "may I come with her? I also have my dead, and where my Sister goes I follow."

"Aye, if thou wilt, daughter of Seyapi, the path is wide enough for three, and if I stay on high, perchance thou that art of my blood mayest find strength to guide her earthwards through the wandering worlds."

Then Nya walked up the cave and sat herself down within the circle of the lamps with her back to the stalactite that was shaped like a tree, bidding Rachel and Noie be seated in front of her. Two of the dwarf-mutes appeared, women both of them, and squatted to right and left, each gazing into a bowl of limpid dew. Nya made a sign, and still gazing into their bowls, these dwarfs began to beat

upon little drums that gave out a curious, rolling noise, while Nya sang to the sound of the drums a wild, low song. With her thin little hands she grasped the right hand of Rachel and of Noie and gazed into their eyes.

Things changed to Rachel. The dwarfs to right and left vanished away, but the low murmuring of their drums grew to a mighty music, and the stars danced to it. The song of Nya swelled and swelled till it filled all the space between earth and heaven; it was the rush of the gale among the forests, it was the beating of the sea upon an illimitable coast, it was the shout of all the armies of the world, it was the weeping of all the women of the world. It lessened again, she seemed to be passing away from it, she heard it far beneath her, it grew tiny in its volume—tiny as if it were an infinite speck or point of sound which she could still discern for millions and millions of miles, till at length distance and vastness overcame it, and it ceased. It ceased, this song of the earth, but a new song began, the song of the rushing worlds. Far away she could hear it, that ineffable music, far in the utter depths of space. Nearer it would come and nearer, a ringing, glorious sound, a sound and yet a voice, one mighty voice that sang and was answered by other voices as sun crossed the path of sun, and caught up and re-echoed by the innumerable choir of the constellations.

They were falling past her, those vast, glowing suns, those rounded planets that were now vivid with light, and now steeped in gloom, those infinite showers of distant stars. They were gone, they and their music together; she was far beyond them in a region where all life was forgotten, beyond the rush of the uttermost comet, beyond the last glimmer of the spies and outposts of the universe. One shape of light she sped into the black bosom of fathomless space, and its solitude shrivelled up her soul. She

could not endure, she longed for some shore on which to set her mortal feet.

Behold! far away a shore appeared, a towering, cliff-bound shore, upon whose iron coasts all the black waves of space beat vainly and were eternally rolled back. Here there was light, but no such light as she had ever known; it did not fall from sun or star, but, changeful and radiant, welled upward from that land in a thousand hues, as light might well from a world of opal. In its dazzling, beautiful rays she saw fantastic palaces and pyramids, she saw seas and pure white mountains, she saw plains and new-hued flowers, she saw gulfs and precipices, and pale lakes pregnant with wavering flame. All that she had ever conceived of as lovely or as fearful, she beheld, far lovelier or a thousandfold more fearful.

Like a great rose of glory that world bloomed and changed beneath her. Petal by petal its splendours fell away and were swallowed in the sea of space, whilst from the deep heart of the immortal rose new splendours took their birth, and fresh-fashioned, mysterious, wonderful, reappeared the measureless city with its columns, its towers and its glittering gates. It endured a moment, or a million years, she knew not which, and lo! where it had been, stood another city, different, utterly different, only a hundred times more glorious. Out of the prodigal heart of the world-rose were they create, into the black bosom of nothingness were they gathered; whilst others, ever more perfect, pressed into their place. So, too, changed the mountains, and so the trees, while the gulfs became a garden and the fiery lakes a pleasant stream, and from the seed of the strange flowers grew immemorial forests wreathed about with rosy mists and bedecked in glimmering dew. With music they were born, on the wings of music they fled away, and after them that sweet music wailed like memories.

A hand took hers and drew her downwards, and

up to meet her leapt myriads of points of light, in every point a tiny face. They gazed at her with their golden eyes ; they whispered together concerning her, and the sound of their whispering was the sound of a sea at peace. They accompanied her to the very heart of the opal rose of life whence all these wonders welled, they set her in a great grey hall roofed in with leaning cliffs, and there they left her desolate.

Fear came upon her, the loneliness choked her, it held her by the throat like a thing alive. She seemed about to die of it, when she became aware that once more she was companioned. Shapes stood about her. She could not see the shapes, save dimly now and again as they moved, but their eyes she could see, their great calm, pitiful eyes which looked down on her, as the eyes of a giant might look down upon a babe. They were terrible, but she did not fear them so much as the loneliness, for at least they lived.

One of the shapes bent over her, for its holy eyes drew near to her, and she heard a voice in her heart asking her for what great cause she had dared to journey hither before the time. She answered, in her heart, not with her lips, that she was bereaved of all she loved and came to seek them. Then, still in her heart, she heard that voice command :

" Let all this Rachel's dead be brought before her."

Instantly doors swung open at the end of that grey hall, and through them with noiseless steps, with shadowy wings, floated a being that bore in its arms a child. Before her it stayed, and the light of its starry head illumined the face of the child. She knew it at once—it was that baby brother whose bones lay by the shore of the African sea. It awoke from its sleep, it opened its eyes, it stretched out its arms and smiled at her. Then it was gone.

Other Shapes appeared, each of them bearing its burden—a companion who had died at school, friends

of her youth and childhood whom she had thought yet living, a young man who once had wished to marry her and who was drowned, the soldier whom she had killed to save the life of Noie. At the sight of him she shrank, for his blood was on her hands, but he only smiled like the rest, and was borne away, to be followed by that witch-doctoress whom the Zulus had slain because of her, who neither smiled nor frowned but passed like one who wonders.

Then another shadow swept down the hall, and in its arms her mother—her mother with joyful eyes, who held thin hands above her as though in blessing, and to whom she strove to speak but strove in vain. She was borne on still blessing her, and where she had been was her father, who blessed her also, and whose presence seemed to shed peace upon her soul. He pointed upwards and was gone, gazing at her earnestly, and lo! a form of darkness cast something at her feet. It was Ishmael who knelt before her, Ishmael whose tormented face gazed up at her as though imploring pardon.

A struggle rent her heart. Could she forgive? Oh! could she forgive him who had slain them all? Now she was aware that the place was filled with the points of light that were Spirits, and that every one of them looked at her awaiting the free verdict of her heart. Rank upon rank, also, the mighty Shapes gathered about her, and in their arms her dead, and all of them looked and looked, awaiting the free verdict of her heart. Then it arose within her, drawn how she knew not from every fibre of her infinite being, it arose within her, that spirit of pity and of pardon. As the dead had stretched out their arms above her, so she stretched out her arms over the head of that tortured soul, and for the first time her lips were given power to speak.

"As I hope for pardon, so I pardon," she said. "Go in peace!"

Voices and trumpets caught up the words, and through the grey hall they rang and echoed, proclaimed for ever, and as they died away he too was gone, and with him went the myriad points of flame, in each of which gleamed a tiny face. She looked about her seeking another Spirit, that Spirit she had travelled so far and dared so much to find. But there came only a little dwarf that shambled alone down the great hall. She knew him at once for Pani, the priest, he who had been crushed in the tempest, Pani, the brother of Eddo. No Shape bore him, for he who on earth had been half a ghost, could walk this ghost-world on his mortal feet, or so her mind conceived. Past her he shuffled shamefaced, and was gone.

Now the great doors at the end of the hall closed; from far away she could see them roll together like lightning-severed clouds, and once more that awful loneliness overcame her. Her knees gave way beneath her, she sank down upon the floor, one little spot of white in its expanse, wishing that the roof of rock would fall and hide her. She covered her face with her golden hair, and wept behind its veil. She looked up and saw two great eyes gazing at her—no face, only two great, steady eyes. Then a voice speaking in her heart asked her why she wept, whose desire had been fulfilled, and she answered that it was because she could not find him whom she sought, Richard Darrien. Instantly the tongues and trumpets took up the name.

"Richard Darrien!" they cried, "Richard Darrien!"

But no Shape swept in bearing the spirit of Richard in its arms.

"He is not here," said the voice in her heart. "Go, seek him in some other world."

She grew angry.

"Thou mockest me," she answered, "He is

dead, and this is the home of the dead; therefore he must be here. Shadow, thou mockest me."

"I mock not," came the swift answer. "Mortal, look now and learn."

Again the doors burst open, and through them poured the infinite rout of the dead. That hall would not hold them all, therefore it grew and grew till her sight could scarcely reach from wall to wall. Shapes headed and marshalled them by races and by generations, perhaps because thus only could her human heart imagine them, but now none were borne in their arms. They came in myriads and in millions, in billions and tens of billions, men and women and children, kings and priests and beggars, all wearing the garments of their age and country. They came like an ocean-tide, and their floating hair was the foam on the tide, and their eyes gleamed like the first shimmer of dawn above the snows. They came for hours and days and years and centuries, they came eternally, and as they came every finger of that host, compared to which all the sands of all the seas were but as a handful, was pointed at her, and every mouth shaped the words:

"Is it I whom thou seekest?"

Million by million she scanned them all, but the face of Richard Darrien was not there.

Now the dead Zulus were marching by. Down the stream of Time they marched in their marshalled regiments. Chaka stood over her—she knew him by his likeness to Dingaan—and threatened her with a little, red-handled spear, asking her how she dared to sit upon the throne of the Spirit of his nation. She began to tell him her story, but as she spoke the wide receding walls of that grey hall fell apart and crumbled, and amidst a mighty laughter the great-eyed Shapes rebuilt them to the fashion of the cave in the mound beneath the tree of the dwarf-folk.

The sound of the trumpets died away, the shrill, sweet music of the spheres grew far and faint.

Rachel opened her eyes. There in front of her sat Nya, crooning her low song, and there on either side crouched the mutes tapping upon their little drums and gazing into their bowls of water, while against her leaned Noie, who stirred like one awaking from sleep. Ages and ages ago when she started on that dread journey, the dwarf to her left was stretching out her hand to steady the bowl at her feet, and now it had but just reached the bowl. A great moth had singed its wings in the lamp, and was fluttering to the ground—it was still in mid-air. Noie was placing her arm about her neck, and it had but begun to fall upon her shoulder!

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE SANCTUARY

Nya ceased her singing, and the dwarf women their beating on the drums.

"Hast thou been a journey, Maiden?" she asked, looking at Rachel curiously.

"Aye, Mother," she answered in a faint voice, "a journey far and strange."

"And thou, Noie, my niece?"

"Aye, Mother," she answered shivering as though with cold or fear, "but I went not with my Sister here, I went alone—for years and years."

"A far journey thou sayest, Inkosazana, and one that was for years and years, thou sayest, Noie, yet the eyes of both of you have been shut for so long only as it takes a burnt moth to fall from the lamp flame to the ground. I think that you slept and dreamed a moment, that is all."

"Mayhap, Mother," replied Rachel, "but if so mine was a most wondrous dream, such as has never visited me before, and as I pray, never may again. For I was borne beyond the stars into the glorious cities of the dead, and I saw all the dead, and those that I had known in life were brought to me by Shapes and Powers whereof I could only see the eyes."

"And didst thou find him whom thou soughtest most of all?"

"Nay," she answered, "him alone I did not find. I sought him, I prayed the Guardians of the dead to show him to me, and they called up all the dead, and

I scanned them every one, and they summoned him by his name, but he was not of their number, and he came not. Only they spoke in my heart, bidding me to look for him in some other world."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nya starting a little, "they said that to thee, did they? Well, worlds are many, and such a search would be long." Then as though to turn the subject, she added, "And what sawest thou, Noie?"

"I, Mother? I went not beyond the stars, I climbed down endless ladders into the centre of the earth, my feet are still sore with them. I reached vast caves full of a blackness that shone, and there many dead folk were walking, going nowhere, and coming back from nowhere. They seemed strengthless but not unhappy, and they looked at me and asked me tidings of the upper world, but I could not answer them, for whenever I opened my lips to speak a cold hand was laid upon my mouth. I wandered among them for many moons, only there was no moon, nothing but the blackness that shone like polished coal, wandered from cave to cave. At length I came to a cave in which sat my father, Seyapi, and near to him my mother, and my other mothers, his wives, and my brothers and sisters, all of whom the Zulus killed, as the wild beast, Ibubesi, told them to do."

"I saw Ibubesi, and he prayed me for my pardon, and I granted it to him," broke in Rachel.

"I did not see him," went on Noie fiercely, "nor would I have pardoned him if I had. Nor do I think that my father and his family pardon him; I think that they wait to bear testimony against him before the Lord of the dead."

"Did Seyapi tell you so?" asked Rachel.

"Nay, he sat there beneath a black tree whereof I could not see the top, and gazed into a bowl of black water, and in that bowl he showed me many pictures

of things that have been and things that are to come, but they are secret, I may say nothing of them."

"And what was the end of it, my niece?" asked Nya, bending forward eagerly.

"Mother, the end of it was that the black tree which was shaped like the tree of our tribe above us, took fire and went up in a fierce flame. Then the roofs of the caves fell in and all the people of the dwarfs flew through the roofs, singing and rejoicing, into a place of light; only," she added slowly, "it seemed to me that I was left alone amidst the ruins of the caves, I and the white ghost of the tree. Then a voice cried to me to make my heart bold, to bear all things with patience, since to those who dare much for love's sake, much will be forgiven. So I woke, but what those words mean I cannot guess, seeing that I love no man, and never shall," and she rested her chin upon her hand and sat there musing.

"No," replied Nya, "thou lovest no man, and therefore the riddle is hard," but as she spoke her eyes fell upon Rachel.

"Mother," said Rachel presently, "my heart is the hungrier for all that it has fed upon. Can thy magic send me back to that country of the dead that I may search for him again? If so, for his sake I will dare the journey."

"Not so," answered Nya shaking her head; "it is a road that very few have travelled, and none may travel twice and live."

Now Rachel began to weep.

"Weep not, Maiden, there are other roads and perchance to-morrow thou shalt walk them. Now lie down and sleep, both of you, and fear no dreams."

So they laid themselves down and slept, but the old witch-wife, Nya, sat waiting and watched them.

"I think I understand," she murmured to herself, as she gazed at the slumbering Rachel, "for to

her who is so pure and good, and who has suffered such cruel wrong, the Guardians would not lie. I think that I understand and that I can find a path. Sleep on, sweet maiden, sleep on in hope."

Then she looked at Noie and shook her grey head.

"I do not understand," she muttered. "The black tree shaped like the Tree of our Tribe, and Seyapi of the old blood seated beneath it. The tree that went up in fire, and the maid of the old blood left alone with the ghost of it, while the dwarf people fled into light and freedom. What does it mean? Ah! that picture in the bowl! Now I can guess. 'Those who dare much for love.' It did not say for love of man, and woman can love woman. But would she dare a deed that none of our race could even dream? Well, the Zulu blood is bold. Perhaps, perhaps. Oh! Eddo, thou black sorcerer, whither art thou leading the Children of the Tree? On thy head be it, Eddo, not on mine, on thy head for ever and for ever."

When Rachel awoke, refreshed, on the following day, she lay a while thinking. Every detail of her vision was perfectly clear in her mind, only now she was sure that it had been but a dream. Yet what a wonderful dream! How, even in her sleep, had she found the imagination to conceive circumstances so inconceivable? That magic rush beyond the stars; that mighty world set round with black cliffs against which rolled the waves of space; that changeful, wondrous world which unfolded itself petal by petal like a rose, every petal lovelier and different from the last; that grey hall roofed with tilted precipices; and then those dead, those multitudes of the dead!

What power had been born in her that she could imagine such things as these? Vision she had, like her mother, but not after this sort. Perhaps it was but an aftermath of her madness, for into the minds

of the mad creep strange sights and sounds, and this place, and the people amongst whom she sojourned, the Ghost-people, the grey Dwarf-people, the Dealers in dreams, the Dwellers in the sombre forest, might well open new doors in such a soul as hers. Or perhaps she was still mad. She did not know, she did not greatly care. All she knew was that her poor heart ached with love for a man who was dead, and yet whom she could not find even among the dead. She had wished to die, but now she longed for death no more, fearing lest after all there should be something in that vision which the magic of Nya had summoned up, and that when she reached the further shore she might not find him who dwelt in a different world. Oh! if only she could find him, then she would be glad enough to go wherever it was that he had gone.

Now Noie was awake at her side, and they talked together.

"We must have dreamt dreams, Noie," she said. "Perhaps the Mother mingled some drug with our food."

"I do not know, Zoola," answered Noie, "but if so I want no more of those dreams which bode no good to me. Besides, who can tell what is dream and what is truth? Mayhap this world is the dream, and the truth is such things as we saw last night," and she would say no more on the matter.

Nothing happened within the Wall that day, that is, nothing out of the common. A certain number of the privileged, priestly caste of the dwarfs were carried or conducted into the holy place, and up to the Fence of Death that they might die there, and a certain number were brought out for burial. Some of those who came in were folk weary of life, or in other words, suicides, and these walked, and some were sick of various diseases, and these were carried. But the end was the same, they always died, though whether this result was really brought about by some

poison distilled from the tree, as Nya alleged, or whether it was the effect of a physical collapse induced by that inherited belief, Rachel never discovered.

At least they died, some almost at once, and some within a day or two of entering that deadly shade, and were borne away to burial by the mutes who spent their spare time in the digging of little graves which they must fill. Indeed, these mutes either knew, or pretended that they knew who would be the occupant of each grave. At least they intimated by signs that this was revealed to them in their bowls, and when the victims appeared within the Wall, took pleasure in leading them to the holes they had prepared, and showing to them with what care these had been dug to suit their stature. For this service they received a fee that such moribund persons brought with them, either of finely woven robes, or of mats, or of different sorts of food, or sometimes of gold and copper rings manufactured by the Umkulu or other subject savages, which they wore upon their wrists and ankles.

Certain of these doomed folk, however, went to their fate with no light hearts, which was not wonderful, as it seemed that these were neither ill nor sought a voluntary euthanasia. They were political victims sent thither by Eddo as an alternative to the terror of the Red Death, whereby according to their strange and ancient creed, they would have risked the spilling of their souls. For the most part the crime of these poor people was that they had been adherents and supporters of the old Mother of the Trees, Nya, over whom Eddo was at last triumphant. On their way up to the Fence such individuals would stop to exchange a last few, sad words with their dethroned priestess.

Then without any resistance they went on with the rest, but from them the mutes received scant offerings, or none at all, with the result that they were cast into the worst situated and most inconvenient graves,

or even tumbled two or three together into some shapeless corner hole. But after all, that mattered nothing to them so long as they received sepulchre within the Wall, which was their birth- or, rather, their death-right.

The priest-mutes themselves were a strange folk, and oddly enough, Rachel observed, by comparison, quite cheerful in their demeanour, for when off duty they would smile and gibber at each other like monkeys, and carry on a kind of market between themselves. They lived in that part of the circumference of the Wall which was behind the hill whereon grew the sacred tree. Here no burials took place, and instead of graves appeared their tiny huts arranged in neat streets and squares. In these they and their forefathers had dwelt from time immemorial; indeed each little hut with a few yards of fenced-in ground about it ornamented with dwarf trees, was a freehold that descended from father to son. For the mutes married, and were given in marriage, like other folk, though their children were few, a family of three being considered very large, while many of the couples had none at all. But those who were born to them were all deaf-mutes, although their other senses seemed to be singularly acute.

These mutes had their virtues; thus some of them were very kind to each other, and especially to those from the outer forest world who came hither to bid farewell to that world, and others, renouncing marriage and all earthly joys, devoted their lives, which appeared to be long, to the worship of the Spirit of the Tree. Also they had their vices, such as theft, and the seducing away of the betrothed of others, but the chief of them was jealousy, which sometimes led to murder by poisoning, an art whereof they were great masters.

When such a crime was discovered, and a case of it happened during the first days of Rachel's

sojourn among them, the accused was put upon his trial before the chief of the mutes, evidence for and against him being given by signs which they all understood. Then if a case were established against him, he was forced to drink a bowl of medicine. If he did this with impunity he was acquitted, but if it disagreed with him his guilt was held to be established. Now came the strange part of the matter. All his life the evil-doer had been accustomed to go within the Fence about his business and take no harm, but after such condemnation he was conducted there with the usual ceremonies and very shortly perished like any other uninitiated person. Whether this issue was due to magic or to mental collapse, or to the previous administration of poison, no one seemed to know, not even Nya herself. So, at least, she declared to Rachel.

At each new moon these mutes celebrated what Rachel was informed they looked upon as a festival. That is, they climbed the Tree of the Tribe and scattered themselves among its enormous branches, where for several hours they mumbled and gibbered in the dark like a troop of baboons. Then they came down, and mounting the huge, surrounding wall, crept around its circumference. Occasionally this journey resulted in an accident, as one of them would fall from the wall and be dashed to pieces, although it was noticed that the unfortunate was generally a person who, although guilty of no actual crime, chanced to be out of favour with the other priests and priestesses. After the circuit of the wall had been accomplished, with or without accidents, the dwarfs feasted round a fire, drinking some spirit that threw them into a sleep in which wonderful visions appeared to them. Such was their only entertainment, if so it could be called, since doubtless the ceremony was of a religious character. For the rest they seldom if ever left the holy place, which was known as " Within

the Wall," most of them never doing so in the course of a long life.

Beyond the burial of the dead they did no work, as their food was brought to them daily by outside people, who were called "the slaves of the Wall." Their only method of conversation was by signs, and they seemed to desire no other. Indeed, if, as occasionally happened, a child was born to any of them who could hear or speak like other human beings, it was either given over to the other dwarfs, or if the discovery was not made until it was old enough to observe, it was sacrificed by being bound to the trunk of the tribal tree "lest it should tell the secret of the Tree."

Such were the weird, half-human folk among whom Rachel was destined to dwell. The Zulus had been bad and bloodthirsty, but compared to these little wizards they seemed to her as angels. The Zulus at any rate had left her her thoughts, but these stunted wretches, she was sure, pried into them and read them with the help of their bowls, for often she caught sight of them signing to each other about her as she passed, and pointing with grins to pictures which they saw in the water.

It was night again, still, silent night made odorous with the heavy cedar scents of the huge tree upon the mound. Rachel and Noie sat before Nya in the cave beneath the burning lamp about which fluttered the big-winged, gilded moths.

"Thou didst not find him yonder among the Shades," said Nya suddenly, as though she were continuing a conversation. "Say now, Maiden, art thou satisfied, or wouldst thou seek for him again?"

"I would seek him through all the heavens and all the earths. Mother, my soul burns for a sight of him, and if I cannot find him, then I must die, and go perchance where he is not."

"Good," said Nya, "the effort wearies me, for I

grow weak, yet for thy sake I will try to help thee, who saved me from the Red Death."

Then the dwarf-women came in and beat upon their drums, and, as before, the old Mother of the Trees began to sing, but Noie sat aside, for in this night's play she would take no part. Again Rachel sank into sleep, and again it seemed to her that she was swept from the earth into the region of the stars and there searched world after world.

She saw many strange and marvellous things, things so wonderful that her memory was buried beneath the mass of them, so that when she woke again she could not recall their details. Only of Richard she saw nothing. Yet as her life returned to her, it seemed to Rachel that for one brief moment she was near to Richard. She could not see him, and she could not hear him, yet certainly he was near her. Then her eyes opened, and Nya ceasing from her song, asked :

"What tidings, Wanderer ? "

" Little," she answered feebly, for she was very tired, and in a faint voice she told her all.

" Good," said Nya, nodding her grey head. " This time he was not so far away. To-morrow I will make thy spirit strong, and then perhaps he will come to thee. Now rest."

So next night Nya laid her charm upon Rachel as before, and again her spirit sought for Richard. This time it seemed to her that she did not leave the earth, but with infinite pain, with terrible struggling, wandered to and fro about it, bewildered by a multitude of faces, led astray by myriads of footsteps. Yet in the end she found him. She heard him not, she saw him not, she knew not where he was, but undoubtedly for a while she was with him, and awoke again, exhausted, but very happy.

Nya heard her story, weighing every word of it but saying nothing. Then she signed to the dwarfs

to bring her a bowl of dew, and stared in it for a long while. The dwarf-women also stared into their bowls, and afterwards came to her, talking to her on their fingers, after which all three of them upset the dew upon a rock, "breaking the pictures."

"Hast thou seen aught?" asked Rachel eagerly.

"Yes, Maiden," answered the Mother. "I and these wise women have seen something, the same thing, and therefore a true thing. But ask not what it was, for we may not tell thee, nor would it help thee if we did. Only be of a good courage, for this I say, there is hope for thee."

So Rachel went to sleep, pondering on these words, of which neither she nor Noie could guess the meaning. The next night when she prayed Nya to lay the spell upon her, the old Mother would not.

"Not so," she said. "Thrice have I rent thy soul from thy body and sent it afar, and this I may do no more and keep thee living, nor could I if I would, for I grow feeble. Neither is it necessary, seeing that although thou knowest it not, that spirit of thine, having found him, is with him wherever he may be, yes, at his side comforting him."

"Aye, but where is he, Mother? Let me look in the bowl and see his face, as I believe that thou hast done."

"Look if thou wilt," and she motioned to one of the dwarf women to place a bowl before her.

So Rachel looked long and earnestly, but saw nothing of Richard, only many fantastic pictures, most of which she knew again for scenes from her own past. At length, worn out, she thrust away the bowl, and asked in a bitter voice why they mocked her, and how it came about that she who had seen the coming of Richard in the pool in Zululand, and the fate of Dingaan the King in the bowl of Eddo, could now see nothing of any worth.

"As regards the vision of the pool I cannot say,

Maiden," replied Nya, "for that was born of thine own heart, and had nothing to do with our magic. As regards the visions in the bowl of Eddo, they were his visions, not thine, or rather my visions that I saw before he started hence. I passed them on to him, and he passed them on to thee, and thou didst pass them on to King Dingaan. Far-sighted and pure-souled as thou art, yet not having been instructed in their wizardry, thou wilt see nothing in the bowls of the dwarfs unless their blood is mingled with thy blood."

"'Their blood mingled with my blood?' What dost thou mean, Mother?"

"What I say, neither more nor less. If Eddo has his will, thou wilt rule after me here as Mother of the Trees. But first thy veins must be opened, and the veins of Eddo must be opened, and Eddo's blood must be poured into thee, and thy blood into him. Then thou wilt be able to read in the bowls as we can, and Eddo will be thy master, and thou must do his bidding while you both shall live."

"If so," answered Rachel, "I think that neither of us will live long."

That night Rachel felt too exhausted to sleep, though why this should be she could not guess, as she had done nothing all day save watch the mutes at their dreary tasks, and it was strange, therefore, that she should feel as though she had made a long journey upon her feet. About an hour before the dawn she saw Nya rise and glide past her towards the mouth of the cave, carrying in her hand a little drum like those used by the mute women. Something impelled her to follow, and waking Noie at her side, she bade her come also.

Outside of the cave by the faint starlight they saw the little shape of Nya creeping down the mound, and thence across the open space towards the wall, and went after her, thinking that she

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intended to pass the wall. But this she did not do, for when she came to its foot Nya, notwithstanding her feebleness, began to climb the rough stones as actively as any cat, and though their ascent seemed perilous enough, reached the crest of the wall sixty feet above in safety, and there sat herself down. Next they heard her beating upon the drum she bore, single strokes always, but some of them slow, and some rapid, with a pause between every five or ten strokes, "as though she were spelling out words," thought Rachel.

After a while Nya ceased her beating, and in the utter silence of the night, which was broken only, as always, by the occasional crash of falling trees, for no breath of air stirred, and all the beasts of prey had sought their lairs before light came, both she and Noie seemed to hear, far, infinitely far away, the faint beat of an answering drum. It would appear that Nya heard it also, for she struck a single note upon hers as though in acknowledgment, after which the distant beating went on, paused as though for a reply from some other unheard drum, and again from time to time went on, perhaps repeating that reply.

For a long while this continued until the sky began to grow grey indeed, when Nya beat for several minutes and was answered by a single, far-off note. Then glancing at the heavens she prepared to descend the wall, while Rachel and Noie slipped back to the cave and feigned to be asleep. Soon she entered, and stood over them shaking her grey head and asking how it came about that they thought that she, the Mother of the Trees, should be so easily deceived.

"So thou sawest us," said Rachel, trying not to look ashamed.

"No; I saw you not with my eyes, either of you, but I felt both of you following me, and heard in my

heart what you were whispering to each other. Well, Inkosazana, art thou the wiser for this journey ? "

" No, Mother, but tell us if thou wilt what thou wast beating on that drum."

" Gladly," she answered. " I was sending certain orders to the slave peoples who still know me as Mother of the Trees, and obey my words. Perhaps thou dost not believe that while I sat upon yonder wall I talked across the desert to the chiefs of the marches upon the far border of the land of the Umkulu, and that by now at my bidding they have sent out men upon an errand of mine."

" What was the errand, Mother ? " asked Rachel curiously.

" I said the errand was mine, not thine, Maiden. It is not pressing, but as I do not know how long my strength will last, I thought it well that it should be settled." Then without more words she coiled herself up on her mat and seemed to go to sleep.

It was after this incident of the drums that Rachel experienced the strangest days, or rather weeks of her life. Nya sent her into no more trances, and to all outward seeming nothing happened. Yet within her much did happen. Her madness had utterly left her and still she was not as other women are, or as she herself had been in health. Her mind seemed to wander and she knew not whither it wandered. Yet for long hours, although she was awake and, so Noie said, talking or eating or walking as usual, it was away from her, and afterwards she could remember nothing. Also this happened at night as well as during the day, and ever more and more often.

She could remember nothing, yet out of this nothingness there grew upon her a continual sense of the presence of Richard Darrien, a presence that seemed to come nearer and nearer, closer and closer to her heart. It was the assurance of this presence that made those long days so happy

to her, though when she was herself, she felt that it could be naught but a dream. Yet why should a dream move her so strangely, and why should a dream weary her so much? Why, after sleeping all night, should she awake feeling as though she had journeyed all night? Why should her limbs ache and she grow thin like one who travels without cease? Why should she seem time after time to have passed great dangers, to have known cold, and heat and want and the struggle against waters and the battling against storms? Why should her knowledge of this Richard, of the very heart and soul of Richard, grow ever deeper till it was as though they were not twain, but one?

She could not answer these questions, and Noie could not answer them, and when she asked Nya the old Mother shook her head and could not, or would not answer. Only the dwarf-mutes seemed to know the answer, for when she passed them they nudged each other, and grinned and thrust their little woolly heads together staring, several of them, into one bowl. But if Noie and Nya knew nothing of the cause of these things the effect of them stirred them both, for they saw that Rachel, the tall and strong, grew faint and weak and began to fade away as one fades upon whom deadly sickness has laid its hand.

Thus three weeks or so went by, until one day in some fashion of her own Nya caused to arise in the mind of Eddo a knowledge of her desire to speak with him. Early the next morning Eddo arrived at the Holy Place accompanied only by his familiar, Hana, and Nya met them alone in the mouth of the cave.

"I see that thou art very white and thin, but still alive, old woman," sneered Eddo, adding: "All the thousands of the people yonder thought that long ere this thou wouldst have passed within the Fence. May I take back that good tidings to them?"

The ancient Mother of the Trees looked at him sternly.

"It is true, thou evil mocker," she said, "that I am white and thin. It is true that I grow like to the skeleton of a rotted leaf, all ribs and netted veins without substance. It is true that my round eyes start from my head like to those of a bush plover, or the tree lizard, and that soon I must pass within the Fence, as thou hast so long desired that I should do that thou mayest reign alone over the thousands of the People of the Dwarfs and wield their wisdom to increase thy power, thou poison-bloated toad. All these things are true, Eddo, yet ere I go I have a word to say to thee to which thou wilt do well to listen."

"Speak on," said Eddo. "Without doubt thou hast wisdom of a sort; honey thou hast garnered during many years, and it is well that I should suck the store before it is too late."

"Eddo," said Nya, "I am not the only one in this Holy Place who grows white and thin. Look, there is another," and she nodded towards Rachel, who walked past them aimlessly with dreaming eyes, attended by Noie, upon whose arm she leant.

"I see," answered Eddo; "this haunted death-prison presses the life out of her, also I think that thou hast sent her Spirit travelling, as thou knowest how to do, and such journeys sap the strength of flesh and blood."

"Perhaps; but now before it is too late I would send her body travelling also; only thou, who hast the power for a while, dost bar the road."

"I know," said Eddo, nodding his head and looking at his companion. "We all know, do we not, Hana? we who have heard certain beatings of drums in the night, and studied dew drops beneath the trees at dawn. Thou wouldst send her to meet another traveller."

"Yes, and if thou art wise thou wilt let her go."

"Why should I let her go," asked the priest passionately, "and with her all my greatness? She must reign here after thee, for at her feet thy Tree fell, and it is the will of the people, who weary of dwarf queens and desire one that is tall and beautiful and white. Moreover, when my blood has been poured into her, her wisdom will be great, greater than thine or that of any Mother that went before thee, for she is '*Wensi*' the Virgin, and her soul is purer than them all. I will not let her go. If she leaves this Holy Place where none may do her harm, she shall die, and then her Spirit may go to seek that other traveller."

"Thou art mad, Eddo, mad and blind with pride and folly. Let her be, and choose another Mother. Now, there is Noie."

"Thy great-niece, Nya, who thinks as thou thinkest, and hates those whom thou hatest. Nay, I will have none of that half-breed. Yonder white Inkosazana shall be our queen and no other."

"Then, Eddo," whispered Nya, leaning forward, and looking into his eyes, "she shall be the last Mother of this people. Fool, there are those who fight for her against whom thou canst not prevail. Thou knowest them not, but I know them, and I tell thee that they make ready thy doom. Have thy way, Eddo; it was not for her that I pleaded with thee, but for the sake of the ancient People of the Ghosts, whose fate draws nigh to them. Fool, have thy way, spin thy web, and be caught in it thyself. I tell thee, Eddo, that thy death shall be redder than any thou hast ever dreamed, nor shall it fall on thee alone. Begone now, and trouble me no more till in another place all that is left of thee shall creep to my feet, praying me for a pardon thou shalt not find. Begone, for the last leaf withers on my Tree and to-morrow I pass within the Fence. Say to the people that their Mother against whom they rebelled is dead, and that she bids them

prepare to meet the evil which, alive, she warded from their heads."

Now Eddo strove to answer, but could not, for there was something in the flaming eyes of Nya which frightened him. He looked at Hana, and Hana looked back at him, then taking each other's hand they slunk away towards the wall, staggering blindly through the sunshine towards the shade.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DREAM IN THE NORTH

Richard Darrien remembered drinking a bowl of milk in the hut in which he was imprisoned at Mafooti, and instantly feeling a cold chill run to his heart and brain, after which he remembered no more for many a day. At length, however, by slow degrees, and with sundry slips back into unconsciousness, life and some share of his reason and memory returned to him. He awoke to find himself lying in a hut roughly fashioned of branches, and attended by a Kaffir woman of middle age.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am named Mami," she answered.

"Mami, Mami! I know the name, and I know the voice. Say, were you one of the wives of Ibubesi, she who spoke with me through the fence?" and he strove to raise himself on his arm to look at her, but fell back from weakness.

"Yes, Inkoos, I was one of his wives."

"Was? Then where is Ibubesi now?"

"Dead, Inkoos. The fire has burned him up with his kraal Mafooti."

"With the kraal Mafooti! Where, then, is the Inkosazana? Answer, woman, and be swift," he cried in a hollow voice.

"Alas! Inkoos, alas! she is dead also, for she was in the kraal when the fire swept it, and was seen standing on the top of a hut where she had taken refuge, and after that she was seen no more."

"Then let me die and go to her," exclaimed Richard with a groan, as he fell back upon his bed, where he lay almost insensible for three more days.

Yet he did not die, for he was young and very strong, and Mami poured milk down his throat to keep the life in him. Indeed little by little something of his strength came back, so that at last he was able to think and talk with her again, and learned all the dreadful story.

He learned how the people of Mafooti, fearing the vengeance of Dingaan, had fled away from their kraal, carrying what they thought to be his body with them, lest it should remain in evidence against them, and taking all the cattle that they could gather. Every one of them had fled that could travel, only Ibubesi and a few sick, and certain folk who chanced to be outside the walls, remaining behind. It was from two of these, who escaped during the burning of the kraal by the Zulus, or by fire from the Heavens, they knew not which, that they had heard of the awful end of Ibubesi, and of his prisoner, the Inkosazana. As for themselves, they had travelled night and day, till they reached a certain secret and almost inaccessible place in the great Quathlamba Mountains, in which people had lived whom Chaka wiped out, and there hidden themselves. In this place they remained, hoping that Dingaan would not care to follow them so far, and purposing to make it their home, since here they found good mealie lands, and fortunately the most of their cattle remained alive. That was all the story, there was nothing more to tell.

A day or two later Richard was able to creep out of the hut and see the place. It was as Mami had said, very strong, a kind of tableland ringed round with precipices that could only be climbed through a single narrow nek, and overshadowed by the great Quathlamba range. The people, who were engaged in planting their corn, gathered round him,

staring at him as though he were one risen from the dead, and greeted him with respectful words. He spoke to several of them, including the two men who had seen the burning of Mafooti, though from a little distance. But they could tell him no more than Mami had done, except that they were sure that the Inkosazana had perished in the flames, as had many of the Zulus, who broke into the town. Richard was sure of it also—who would not have been ?—and crept back broken-hearted to his hut, he who had lost all, and longed that he might die.

But he did not die, he grew strong again, and when he was well and fit to travel, went to the headmen of the people, saying that now he desired to leave them and return to his own place in the Cape Colony. The headmen said No, he must not leave, for in their hearts they were sure that he would go, not to the Cape Colony, but to Zululand, there to discover all he could as to the death of the Inkosazana. So they told him that with them he must bide, for then if the Zulus tracked them out they would be able to produce him, who otherwise would be put to the spear, every man of them, as his murderers. The sin of Ibubesi who had been their chief, clung to them, and they knew well what Dingaan and Tamboosa had sworn should happen to those who harmed the white chief, Dario, who was under the mantle of their Inkosazana.

Richard reasoned with them, but it was of no use, they would not let him go. Therefore in the end he appeared to fall in with their humour, and meanwhile began to plan escape. One dark night he tried it indeed, only to be seized in the mouth of the nek, and brought back to his hut. Next morning the headmen spoke with him, telling him that he should only depart thence over their dead bodies, and that they watched him night and day ; that the nek, moreover, was always guarded. Then they made an offer to him. He was a white man, they said, and cleverer than

they were ; let them come under his wing, let him be their chief, for he would know how to protect them from the Zulus and any other enemies. He could take over the wives of Ibubesi (at this proposition Richard shuddered), and they would obey him in all things, only he must not attempt to leave them—which he should never do alive.

Richard put the proposal by, but in the end, not because he wished it, but by the mere weight of his white man's blood, and for the lack of anything else to do, drifted into some such position. Only at the wives of Ibubesi, or any other wives, he would not so much as look, a slight that gave offence to those women, but made the others laugh.

So, for certain long weeks he sat in that secret nook in the mountains as the chief of a little Kaffir tribe, occupying himself with the planting of crops, the building of walls and huts, the drilling of men and the settling of quarrels. All day he worked thus, but after the day came the night when he did not work, and those nights he dreaded. For then the languor, not of body, but of mind, which the poison the old witch-doctoress had given to Ishmael had left behind it, would overcome him, bringing with it black despair, and his grief would get a hold of him, torturing his heart. For of the memory of Rachel he could never be rid for a single hour, and his love for her grew deeper day by day. And she was dead ! Oh, she was dead, leaving him living.

One night he dreamed of Rachel, dreamed that she was searching for him and calling him. It was a very vivid dream, but he woke up and it passed away as such dreams do. Only all the day that followed he felt a strange throbbing in his head, and found himself turning ever towards the north. The next night he dreamed again of her, and heard her say, " The search has been far and long, but I have found you, Richard. Open your eyes now, and you will see

my face." So he opened his eyes, and there, sure enough, on the darkness he perceived the outline of her sweet, remembered face, about which fell her golden hair. For one moment only he perceived it, then it was gone, and after that her presence never seemed to leave him. He could not see her, he could not touch her, and yet she was ever at his side. His brain ached with the thought of her, her breath seemed to fan his hands and hair. At night her face floated before him, and in his dreams her voice called him, saying: "*Come to me, come to me, Richard. I am in need of you. Come to me. I myself will be your guide.*"

Then he would wake, and remembering that she was dead, grew sure and ever surer that the Spirit of Rachel was calling him down to death. It called him from the north, always from the north. Soon he could scarcely walk southwards, or east or west, for ere he had gone many yards his feet turned and set his face towards the north, that was to the narrow nek between the precipices which the Kaffirs guarded night and day.

One evening he went to his hut to sleep, if sleep would come to him. It came, and with it that face and voice, but the face seemed paler, and the voice more insistent.

"Will you not listen to me," it said, "you who were my love? For how long must I plead with you? Soon my power will leave me, the opportunity will be passed, and then how will you find me, Richard, my lover? Rise up, rise up and follow ere it be too late, for I myself will be your guide."

He awoke. He could bear it no more. Perhaps he was mad, and these were visions of his madness, mocking visions that led him to his death. Well, if so, he still would follow them. Perhaps her body was buried in the north. If so, he would be buried there also; perhaps her Soul dwelt in the north. If so, his soul would fly thither to join it. The Kaffirs would

kill him in the pass. Well, if so, he would die with his face set northwards whither Rachel drew him.

He rose up and wrapped himself in a cloak of goatskins. He filled a hide bag with sun-dried flesh and parched corn, and hung it about his shoulders with a gourd of water, for after all he might live a little while and need food and drink. As he had no gun he took a staff and a knife and a broad-bladed spear, and leaving the hut, set his face northward and walked towards the mouth of the nek. At the first step which he took the torment in his head seemed to leave him, who fought no longer, who had become obedient to that mysterious summons. Quietness and confidence possessed him. He was going to his end, but what did it matter? The dream beckoned and he must follow. The moon shone bright, but he took no trouble to hide himself, it did not seem to be worth while.

Now he was in the nek and drawing near to the place where the guard was stationed, still he marched on, boldly, openly. As he thought, they were on the alert. They drew out from behind the rocks and barred his path.

"Whither goest thou, lord Dario?" asked their captain. "Thou knowest that here thou mayest not pass."

"I follow a Ghost to the north," he answered, "and living or dead, I pass."

"*Ow!*" said the captain. "He says that he follows a Ghost. Well, we have nothing to do with ghosts. Take him, unharmed if possible, but take him."

So, urged thereto by their own fears, since for their safety's sake they dared not let him go, the men sprang towards him. They sprang towards him where he stood waiting the end, for give back he would not, and of a sudden fell down upon their faces, hiding their heads among the stones. Richard did not know

what had happened to them that they behaved thus strangely, nor did he care. Only seeing them fallen he walked on over them, and pursued his way along the nek and down it to the plains beyond.

All that night he walked, looking behind him from time to time to see if any followed, but none came. He was alone, quite alone, save for the dream that led him towards the north. At sunrise he rested and slept a while, then, awaking after midday, went on his road. He did not know the road, yet never was he in doubt for a moment. It was always clear to him whither he should go. That night he finished his food and again slept a while, going forward at the dawn. In the morning he met some Kaffirs, who questioned him, but he answered only that he was following a Dream to the north. They stared at him, seemed to grow frightened and ran away. But presently some of them came back and placed food in his path, which he took and left them.

He came to the kraal Mafooti. It was utterly deserted, and he wandered amidst its ashes. Here and there he found the bones of those who had perished in the fire, and turned them over with his staff wondering whether any of them had belonged to Rachel. In that place he slept a night thinking that perhaps his journey was ended, and that here he would die where he believed that Rachel had died. But when he waked at the dawn, it was to find that something within him still drew him towards the north, more strongly indeed than ever before.

So he left what had been the town Mafooti. Walking along the edge of the cleft into which Ishmael had leapt on fire, he climbed the walls built with so much toil to keep out the Zulus, and at last came to the river which Rachel had swum. It was low now, and wading it he entered Zululand. Here the natives seemed to know of his approach, for they gathered in numbers watching him, and put food in his path. But they

would not speak to him, and when he addressed them, saying that he followed a Dream and asking if they had seen the Dream, they cried out that he was *tagati*, bewitched, and fled away.

He continued his journey, finding each night a hut prepared for him to sleep in, and food for him to eat, till at length one evening he reached the Great Place, Umgugundhlovu. Through its streets he marched with a set face, while thousands stared at him in silence. Then a captain pointed out a hut to him, and into it he entered, ate and slept. At dawn he rose, for he knew that here he must not tarry; the spirit face of Rachel still hung before him, the spirit voice still whispered—"*Forward, forward to the north. I myself will be your guide.*" In his path sat the King and his Councillors, and around them a regiment of men. He walked through them unheeding, till at length, when he was in front of the King, they barred his road, and he halted.

"Who art thou and what is thy business?" asked an old Councillor with a withered hand.

"I am Richard Darrien," he answered, "and here I have no business. I journey to the north. Stay me not."

"We know thee," said the Councillor, "thou art the lord Dario that didst dwell in the shadow of the Inkosazana. Thou art the white chief whom the wild beast, Ibubesi, slew at the kraal Mafooti. Why does thy ghost come hither to trouble us?"

"Living or dead, ghost or man, I travel to the north. Stay me not," he answered.

"What seekest thou in the north, thou lord Dario?"

"I seek a Dream; a Spirit leads me to find a Dream. Seest thou it not, Man with the withered hand?"

"Ah!" they repeated, "he seeks a Dream. A Spirit leads him to find a Dream in the north."

"What is this Dream like?" asked Mopo of the withered hand.

"Come, stand at my side and look. There, dost thou see it floating in the air before us, thou who hast eyes that can read a Dream?"

Mopo came and looked, then his knees trembled a little and he said:

"Aye, lord Dario, I see and I know that face."

"Thou knowest the face, old fool," broke in Dingaan angrily. "Then whose is it?"

"O King," answered Mopo, dropping his eyes, "it is not lawful to speak the name, but the face is the face of one who sat where that wanderer stands, and showed thee certain pictures in a bowl of water."

Now Dingaan trembled, for the memory of those visions haunted him night and day; moreover he thought at times that they drew near to their fulfilment.

"The white man is mad," he said, "and thou, Mopo, art mad also. I have often thought it, and that it would be well if thou wentest on a long journey —for thy health. This Dario shall stay here a while. I will not suffer him to wander through my land crazing the people with his tales of dreams and visions. Take him and hold him; the Circle of the Doctors shall inquire into the matter."

So Dingaan spoke, who in his heart was afraid lest this wild-eyed Dario should learn that he had given the Inkosazana to the dwarf folk when she was mad, to appease them after they had prophesied evil to him. Also he remembered that it was because of the murders done by Ibubesi that the Inkosazana had gone mad, and did not understand if Dario had been killed at the kraal Mafooti how it could be that he now stood before him. Therefore he thought that he would keep him a prisoner until he found out all the truth of the matter, and whether he were still a

man or a ghost or a wizard clothed in the shape of the dead.

At the bidding of the King, guards sprang forward to seize Richard, but the old Councillor, Mopo, shrunk away behind him hiding his eyes with his withered hand. They sprang forward, and yet they laid no finger on him, but fell off to right and left, saying :

" Kill us, if thou wilt, Black One, we cannot ! "

" The wizard has bewitched them," said Dingaan angrily. " Here, you Doctors, you whose trade it is to catch wizards, take this white fellow and bind him."

Unwillingly enough the Doctors, of whom there were eight or ten sitting apart, rose to do the King's bidding. They came on towards Richard, some of them singing songs, and some muttering charms, and as they came he laughed and said :

" Beware ! you *Abangoma*, the Dream is looking at you very angrily." Then they too broke away to right and left, crying out that this was a wizard against whom they had no power.

Now Dingaan grew mad with wrath, and shouted to his soldiers to seize the white man, and if he resisted them to kill him with their sticks, for of witchcraft they had known enough in Zululand of late.

So thick as bees the regiment formed up in front of him, shouting and waving their kerries, for here in the King's Place they bore no spears.

" Make way there," said Richard, " I can stay no longer, I must to the north."

The soldiers did not stir, only a captain stepped out bidding him give up his spear and yield himself, or be killed. Richard walked forward, and at a sign from the captain, men sprang at him, lifting their kerries, to dash out his brains. Then suddenly in front of Richard there appeared something faint and white, something that walked before him. The soldiers saw it, and the kerries fell from their hands.

The regiment behind saw it, and turning, burst away like a scared herd of cattle. They did not wait to seek the gates, they burst through the fence of the enclosure, and were gone, leaving it flat behind them. The King and his Councillors saw it also, and more clearly than the rest.

"*The Inkosazana!*" they cried. "It is the Inkosazana who walks before him that she loved!" and they fell upon their faces. Only Dingaan remained seated on his stool.

"Go," he said hoarsely to Richard, "go, thou wizard, north or south or east or west, if only thou wilt take that Spirit with thee, for she bodes evil to my land."

So Richard, who had seen nothing, marched away from the kraal Umgugundhlovu, and once more set his face towards the north, the north that drew him as it draws the needle of a compass.

The road that Rachel and the dwarfs had travelled he travelled also. Although from day to day he knew not where his feet would lead him, still he travelled it step by step. Nor did any hurt come to him. In the country where men dwelt, being forewarned of his coming by messengers, they brought him food and guarded him, and when he passed out into the wilderness some other power guarded him. He had no fear at all. At night he would lie down without a fire, and the lions would roar about him, but they never harmed him. He would plunge into a swamp or a river and always pass it safely. When water failed he would find it without search; when there was no food, it would seem to be brought to him. Once an eagle dropped a bustard at his feet. Once he found a buck fresh slain by leopards. Once when he was very hungry he saw that he had laid down to sleep by a nest of ostrich eggs, and this food he cooked, making fire after the native fashion with sharp sticks, as he knew how to do.

At length all the swamps were passed and in the third week of his journeying he reached the sloping uplands, on the edge of which he awoke one morning to find himself surrounded by a circle of great men, giants, who stood staring at him. He arose, thinking that at last his hour had come, as it seemed to him that they were about to kill him. But instead of killing him these huge men saluted him humbly, and offered him food upon their knees, and new hide shoes for his feet—for his own were worn out—and cloaks and garments of skin, which things he accepted thankfully, for by now he was almost naked. Then they brought a litter and wished him to enter it, but this he refused. Heeding them no more, as soon as he had eaten and filled his bag and water-bottle, he started on towards the north. Indeed, he could not have stayed if he had wished; his brain seemed to be full of one thought only, to travel till he reached his journey's end, whatever it might be, and before his eyes he saw one thing only, the spirit face of Rachel, that led him on towards that end. Sometimes it was there for hours, then for hours again it would be absent. When it was present he looked at it; when it was gone he dreamed of it, for him it was the same. But one thing was ever with him, that magnet in his heart which drew his feet towards the north, and from step to step showed him the road that he should travel.

A number of the giant men accompanied him. He noticed it, but took no heed. So long as they did not attempt to stay or turn him he was indifferent whether they came or went away. As a result he travelled in much more comfort, since now everything was made easy and ready for him. Thus he was fed with the best that the land provided, and at night shelters were built for him to sleep in. He discovered that a captain of the giants could understand a few words of some native language which he knew, and asked him why

they helped him. The captain replied by order of "Mother of Trees." Who or what "Mother of Trees" might be Richard was unable to discover, so he gave up his attempts at talk and walked on.

They traversed the fertile uplands and reached the edge of the fearful desert. It did not frighten him; he plunged into it as he would have plunged into a sea, or a lake of fire, had it lain in his way. He was like a bird whose instinct at the approach of summer or of winter leads it without doubt or error to some far spot beyond continents and oceans, some land that it has never seen, leads it in surety and peace to its appointed rest. A guard of the giant men came with him into the desert, also carriers who bore skins of water. In that burning heat the journey was dreadful, yet Richard accomplished it, wearing down all his escort, until at its further lip but one man was left. There even he sank exhausted and began to beat upon a little drum that he carried, which drum had been passed on to him by those who were left behind. But Richard was not exhausted. His strength seemed to be greater than it had ever been before, or that which drew him forward had acquired more power. He wondered vaguely why a man should choose such a place and time to play upon a drum, and went on alone.

Before him, some miles away, he saw a forest of towering trees that stretched further than his eye could reach. As he approached that forest heading for a certain tall tree, why he knew not, the sunset dyed it red as though it had been on fire, and he thought that he discerned little shapes flitting to and fro amidst the boles of trees. Then he entered the forest, whereof the boughs arched above him like the endless roof of a cathedral borne upon innumerable pillars. There was deep gloom that grew presently to darkness wherein here and there glow-worms shone faintly like tapers dying before an altar, and winds sighed like

echoes of evening prayers. He could see to walk no longer, sudden weariness overcame him, so according to his custom he laid himself down to sleep at the bole of a great tree.

A while had passed, he never knew how long, when Richard was awakened from deep slumber by feeling many hands fiercely at work upon him. These hands were small like those of children; this he could tell from the touch of them, although the darkness was so dense that he was able to see nothing. Two of them gripped him by the throat so as to prevent him from crying out; others passed cords about his wrists, ankles and middle until he could not stir a single limb. Then he was dragged back a few paces and lashed to the bole of a tree, as he guessed, that under which he had been sleeping. The hands let go of him, and his throat being free he called out for help. But those vast forest aisles seemed to swallow up his voice. It fell back on him from the canopy of huge boughs above, it was lost in the immense silence. Only from close at hand he heard little peals of thin and mocking laughter. So he too grew silent, for who was there to help him here?

He struggled to loose himself, for the impalpable power which had guided him so far was now at work within him more strongly than ever before. It called to him to come, it drew him onward, it whispered to him that the goal was near. But the more he writhed and twisted the deeper did the cruel cords or creepers cut into his flesh. Yet he fought on till, utterly exhausted, his head fell forward, and he swooned away.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE END AND THE BEGINNING

On the day following that when she had summoned Eddo to speak with her, Nya sat at the mouth of the cave. It was late afternoon, and already the shadows gathered so quickly that save for her white hair, her little childlike shape, withered now almost to a skeleton, was scarcely visible against the black rock. Walking to and fro in her aimless fashion, as she would do for hours at a time, Rachel accompanied by Noie passed and repassed her, till at length the old woman lifted her head and listened to something which was quite inaudible to their ears. Then she beckoned to Noie, who led Rachel to her.

"Maiden beloved," she said in a feeble voice, after they had sat down in front of her, "my hour has come, I have sent for thee to bid thee farewell till we meet again in a country where thou hast travelled for a little while. Before the sun sets I pass within the Fence."

At this tidings Rachel began to weep, for she had learned to love this old dwarf-woman who had been so kind to her in her misery, and she was now so weak that she could not restrain her fears.

"Mother," she said, "for thee it is joy to go. I know it, and therefore cannot wish that thou shouldst stay. Yet what shall I do when thou hast left me alone amidst all these cruel folk? Tell me, what shall I do?"

"Perchance thou wilt seek another helper, Maiden, and perchance thou shalt find another to guard

and comfort thee. Follow thy heart, obey thy heart, and remember the last words of Nya—that no harm shall come to thee. Nay—if I know it, I may tell thee no more, thou who couldst not hear what the drums said to me but now. Farewell," and turning round she made a sign to certain dwarf-mutes who were gathered behind her as though they awaited her commands.

"Hast thou no last word for me, Mother?" asked Noie.

"Aye, Child," she answered. "Thy heart is very bold, and thou also must follow it. Though thy sin should be great, perchance thy greater love may pay its price. At least thou art but an arrow set upon the string, and that which must be, will be. I think that we shall meet again ere long. Come hither and kneel at my side."

Noie obeyed, and for a little space Nya whispered in her ear, while as she listened Rachel saw strange lights shining in Noie's eyes, lights of terror and of pride, lights of hope and of despair.

"What did she say to you, Noie?" asked Rachel presently.

"I may not tell, Zoola," she answered. "Question me no more."

Now the mutes brought forward a slight litter woven of boughs on which the withered leaves still hung, boughs from Nya's fallen tree. In this litter they placed her, for she could no longer walk, and lifted it on to their shoulders. For one moment she bade them halt, and calling Rachel and Noie to her, kissed them upon the brow, holding up her thin child-like hands over them in blessing. Then followed by them both, the bearers went forward with their burden, taking the road that ran up the hill towards the sacred tree. As the sun set they passed within the Fence, and laying down the litter without a word by the bole of the tree, turned and departed.

The darkness fell, and through it Rachel and Noie heard Nya singing for a little while. The song ceased, and they descended the hill to the cave, for there they feared to stay lest the Tree should draw them also. They ate a little food whilst the two women mutes who had sat on each side of Nya when she showed her magic, stared, now at them and now into the bowls of dew that were set before them, wherein they seemed to find something that interested them much. Noie prayed Rachel to sleep, and she tried to do so, and could not. For hour after hour she tossed and turned, and at length sat up, saying to Noie :

" I have fought against it, and I can stay here no longer. Noie, I am being drawn from this place out into the forest, and I must go."

" What draws thee, Sister ? " asked Noie. " Is it Eddo ? "

" No, I think not, nothing to do with Eddo. Oh ! Noie, Noie, it is the spirit of Richard Darrien. He is dead, but for days and weeks his spirit has been with my spirit, and now it draws me into the forest to die and find him."

" Then that is an evil journey thou wouldst take, Zoola ? "

"Not so, Noie, it is the best and happiest of journeys. The thought of it fills me with joy. What said Nya ? Follow thy heart. So I follow it. Noie, farewell, for I must go away."

" Nay," answered Noie, " if thou goest I go, who also was bidden to follow my heart that is sister to thy heart."

Rachel reasoned with her, but she would not listen. The end of it was that the two of them rose and threw on their cloaks ; also Rachel took the great Umkulu spear which she had used as a staff on her journey from the desert to the forest. All this while the dwarf-women watched her, but did nothing, only watched.

They left the cave and walked to the mouth of the zig-zag slit in the great wall which was open.

"Perhaps the mutes will kill us in the heart of the wall," said Noie.

"If so the end will be soon and swift," answered Rachel.

Now they were in the cleft, following its slopes and windings. Above them they could hear the movements of the guardians of the wall who sat amongst the rough stones, but these did not try to stop them; indeed once or twice when they did not know which way to turn in the darkness, little hands took hold of Rachel's cloak and guided her. So they passed through the wall in safety. Outside of it Rachel paused a moment, looking this way and that. Then of a sudden she turned, and walked swiftly towards the south.

It was dark, densely dark in the forest, yet she never seemed to lose her path. Holding Noie by the hand she wound in and out between the tree-trunks without stumbling or even striking her foot against a root. For an hour or more they walked on this, the strangest of strange journeys, till at length Rachel whispered:

"Something tells me to stay here," and she leaned against a tree and stayed, while Noie, who was tired, sat down between the jutting roots of the tree.

It was a dead tree, and the top of it had been torn off in some hurricane so that they could see the sky above them, and by the grey hue of it knew that it was drawing near to dawn.

The sun rose, and its arrows, that even at midday could never pass the canopy of foliage, shot straight and vivid between the tall bare trunks. Oh! Rachel knew the place. It was that place which she had dreamed of as a child in the island of the flooded river. Just so had the light of the rising sun fallen on the boles of the great trees, and on her white cloak and

out-spread hair, fallen on her and on another. She strained her eyes into the gloom. Now those rays pierced it also, and now by them she saw the yellow-bearded, half-naked man of that long-dead dream leaning against the tree. His eyes were shut, without doubt he was dead, this was but a vision of him who had drawn her hither to share his death. It was the spirit of Richard Darrien!

She drew a little nearer, and the eyes opened, gazing at her. Also from that form of his was cast a long shadow—there it lay upon the dead leaves. How came it, she wondered, that a spirit could throw a shadow, and why was a spirit bound to a tree, as now she perceived he was? He saw her, and in those grey eyes of his there came a wonderful look. He spoke.

"You have drawn me from far, Rachel, but I have never seen all of you before, only your face floating in the air before me, although others saw you. Now I see you also, so I suppose that my time has come. It will soon be over. Wait a little there, where I can look at you, and presently we shall be together again. I am glad."

Rachel could not speak. A lump rose in her throat and choked her. Betwixt fear and hope her heart stood still. Only with the spear in her hand she pointed at her own shadow thrown by the level rays of the rising sun. He looked, and notwithstanding the straitness of his bonds she saw him start.

"If you are a ghost why have you a shadow?" he asked hoarsely. "And if you are not a ghost, how did you come into this haunted place?"

Still Rachel did not seem to be able to speak. Only she glided up to him and kissed him on the lips. Now at length he understood—they both understood that they were still living creatures beneath the sky, not the denizens of some dim world which lies beyond.

"Free me," he said in a faint voice, for his brain

"'If you are a ghost, why have you a shadow?'"
(*see page 362*).

reeled. "I was bound here in my sleep. They will be back presently."

Her intelligence awoke. With a few swift cuts of the spear she held Rachel severed his bonds, then picking up his own assegai that lay at his feet she thrust it into his numbed hand. As he took it the forest about them seemed to become alive, and from behind the boles of the trees around appeared a number of dwarfs who ran towards them, headed by Eddo. Noie sprang forward also, and stood at their side. Rachel turned on Eddo swiftly as a startled deer. She seemed to tower over him, the spear in her hand.

"What does this mean, Priest?" she asked.

"Inkosazana," he answered humbly, "it means that I have found a way to tempt thee from within the Wall where none might break thy sanctuary. Thou drewest this man to thee from far with the strength that old Nya gave thee. We knew it all, we saw it all, and we waited. Day by day in our bowls of dew we watched him coming nearer to thee. We heard the messages of Nya on the drums, bidding the Umkulu meet and escort him; we heard the last answering message from the borders of the desert, telling her that he was nigh. Then while he followed his magic path through the darkness of the forest we seized and bound him, knowing well that if he could not come to thee, thou wouldst come to him. And thou hast come."

"I understand. What now, Eddo?"

"This, Inkosazana: Thou hast been named Mother of the Trees by the people of the Dwarfs; be pleased to come with us that we may instal thee in thy great office."

"This lord here," said Rachel, "is my promised husband. What of him?"

Eddo bowed and smiled, a fearful smile, and answered:

"The Mother of the Trees has no husband. Wisdom

is her husband. He has served his purpose, which was to draw thee from within the Wall, and for this reason only we permitted him to enter the holy forest living. Now he bides here to die, and since he has won thy love we will honour him with the White Death. Bind him to the tree again."

In an instant the spear that Rachel held was at Eddo's throat.

"Dwarf," she cried, "this is my man, and I am no Mother of Trees and no pale ghost, but a living woman. Let but one of these monkeys of thine lay a hand upon him, and thou diest, by the Red Death, Eddo, aye, by the Red Death. Stir a single inch, and this spear goes through thy heart, and thy spirit shall be spilled with thy blood."

The little priest sank to his knees trembling, glancing about him for a means of escape.

"If thou killest me, thou diest also," he hissed.

"What do I care if I die?" she answered. "If my man dies, I wish to die," then added in English: "Richard, take hold of him by one arm, and Noie, take the other. If he tries to escape kill him at once, or if you are afraid, I will."

So they seized him by his arms.

"Now," said Rachel, "let us go back to the Sanctuary, for there they dare not touch us. We cannot try the desert without water; also they would follow and kill us with their poisoned arrows. Tell them, Noie, that if they do not attempt to harm us, we will set this priest of theirs free within the Wall. But if a hand is lifted against us, then he dies at once—by the Red Death."

"Touch them not, touch them not," piped Eddo, "lest my ghost should be spilt with my blood. Touch them not, I command you."

The company of dwarfs chattered together like parrots at the dawn, and the march began. First went Eddo, dragged along between Richard and Noie, and

after them, the raised spear in her hand, followed Rachel, while on either side, hiding themselves behind the boles of the trees, scrambled the people of the dwarfs. Back they went thus through the forest, Rachel telling them the road till at length the huge grey wall loomed up before them. They came to the slit in it, and Noie asked :

" What shall we do now ? Kill this priest, take him in with us as a hostage, or let him go ? "

" I said that he should be set free," answered Rachel, " and he would do us more harm dead than living ; also his blood would be on our hands. Take him through the Wall, and loose him there."

So once more they passed the slopes and passages, while the mutes above watched them from their stones with marvelling eyes, till they reached the open space beyond, and there they loosed Eddo. The priest sprang back out of reach of the dreaded spears, and in a voice thick with rage, cried to them :

" Fools ! You should have killed me while you could, for now you are in the trap, not I. You are strong and great, but you cannot live without food. We may not enter here to hurt you, but you shall starve, you shall starve until you creep out and beg my mercy."

Then making signs to the dwarfs who sat about above, he vanished between the stones.

" You should have killed him, Zoola," said Noie, " for now he will live to kill us."

" I think not, Sister," answered Rachel. " Nya said that I should follow my heart, and my heart bid me to let him go. Our hands are clean of his blood, but if he had died, who can tell ? Blood is a bad seed to sow."

Then, forgetting Eddo, she turned to Richard and began to ply him with questions.

But he seemed to be dazed and could answer little. It was as though some unnatural, supporting strength

had been withdrawn, and now all the fatigues of his fearful journey were taking effect upon him. He could scarcely stand, but reeled to and fro like a man in drink, so that the two women were obliged to support him across the burial ground towards the cave. Advancing thus they entered into the shadow of the Holy Tree, and there at the edge of it met another procession descending from the mound. Eight mutes bore a litter of boughs, and on it lay Nya, dead, her long white hair hanging down on either side of the litter. With bowed heads they stood aside to let her pass to the grave made ready for her in a place of honour near the Wall where for a thousand years only the Mothers of the Trees had been laid to rest.

Then they went on, and entered the cave where the lamps burned before the great stalactite and the heaps of offerings that were piled about it. Here sat the two women priests gazing into their bowls as they had left them. The death of Nya had not moved them, the advent of this white man did not seem to move them. Perhaps they expected him; at any rate food was made ready, and a bed of rugs prepared on which he could lie.

Richard ate some of the food, staring at Rachel all the while with vacant eyes as though she were still but a vision, the figment of a dream. Then he muttered something about being very tired, and sinking back upon the rugs fell into a deep sleep.

In that sleep he remained scarcely stirring for full four-and-twenty hours, while Rachel watched by his side, till at length her weariness overcame her, and she slept also. When she opened her eyes again they saw no other light than that which crept in from the mouth of the cave. The lamps which always burned there were out. Noie, who was seated near by, heard her stir, and spoke.

"If thou art rested, Zoola," she said, "I think that we had better carry the white lord from this

place, for the two witch-women have gone, and I can find no more oil to fill the lamps."

So they felt their way to Richard, purposing to lift him between them, but at Rachel's touch he awoke, and with their help walked out of the cave. In the open space beyond they saw a strange sight, for across it were streaming all the dwarf-mutes carrying their aged and sick and infants, and bearing on their backs or piled up in litters their mats and cooking utensils. Evidently they were deserting the Sanctuary.

"Why are they going?" asked Rachel.

"I do not know," answered Noie, "but I think it is because no food has been brought to them as usual, and they are hungry. You remember that Eddo said we should starve. Only fear of death by hunger would make them leave a place where they and their forefathers have lived for generations."

Presently they were all gone. Not a living creature was left within the Wall except these three, nor were any more dwarfs brought in to die beneath the Holy Tree. Now, at length Richard seemed to awake, and taking Rachel by the hand began to ask questions of her in a low stammering voice, since words did not seem to come readily to him who had not spoken his own language for so long.

"Before you begin to talk, Sister," broke in Noie, "let us go and see if we can close the cleft in the Wall, for otherwise how shall we sleep in peace? Eddo and the dwarfs might creep in by night and murder us."

"I do not think they dare shed blood in their Holy Place," answered Rachel. "Still, let us see what we can do; it may be best."

So they went to the cleft, and as the stone door was open and they could not shut it, at one very narrow spot they rolled down rocks from the loose sides of the ancient wall above in such a fashion that it would be difficult to pass through or over them from without. This hard task took them many hours;

moreover, it was labour wasted, since, as Rachel had thought probable, the dwarfs never tried to pass the Wall, but waited till hunger forced them to surrender.

Towards evening they returned to the cave and collected what food they could find. It was but little, enough for two spare meals, no more ; nor could they discover any in the town of the dwarfs behind the Tree. Only of water they had plenty from the stream that ran out of the cave.

They ate a few mouthfuls, then took their mats and cloaks and went to camp by the opening in the wall, so that they might guard against surprise. Now for the first time they found leisure to talk, and Rachel and Richard told each other a little of their wonderful stories. But they did not tell them all, for their minds seemed to be bewildered, and there was much that they were not able to explain. It was enough for them to know that they had been brought together again thus marvellously, by what power they knew not, and that still living, they who for long weeks had deemed the other dead, were able to hold each other's hands and gaze into each other's eyes. Moreover, now that this had been brought about they were tired, so tired that they could scarcely speak above a whisper. The end of it was that they fell asleep, all of them, and so slept till morning, when they awoke somewhat refreshed, and ate what remained of the food.

The second day was like the first, only hotter and more sultry. Noie climbed to the top of the wall to watch, while Richard and Rachel wandered about among the little, ant-heap-like graves, and through the dwarf village, talking and wondering, happy even in their wretchedness. But before the day was gone hunger began to get a hold of them ; also the terrible, stifling heat oppressed them so that their words seemed to die between their lips, and they could only sit against the wall, looking at one another.

Towards evening Noie descended from the Wall and reported that large numbers of the dwarfs were keeping watch without, flitting to and fro between the trunks of the trees like shadows. The stifling night went by, and another day dawned. Having no food they went to the stream and drank water. Then they sat down in the shadow and waited through the long hot hours. Towards evening, when it grew a little cooler, they gathered up their strength and tried to find some way of escape before it was too late. Richard suggested that as flight was impossible they should give themselves up to the dwarfs, but Rachel answered No, for then Eddo would certainly kill him and Noie, and take her to fill the place of Mother of the Trees until she became useless to him, when she would be murdered also.

"Then there is nothing left for us but to die," said Richard.

"Nothing but to die," she answered, "to die together; and, dear, that should not be so hard, seeing that for so long we have thought each other dead apart."

"Yet it is hard," answered Richard, "after living through so much and being led so far to die at last and go whither we know not, before our time."

Rachel looked at Noie, who sat opposite to them, her head rested on her hand.

"Have you anything to say, Sister?" she asked.

"Yes, Zoola. Here is a little moss that I have found upon the stones," and she produced a small bundle. "Let us boil it and eat, it will keep us alive for another day."

"What is the use?" asked Rachel, "unless there is more."

"There is no more," said Noie, "for the leaves of yonder tree are deadly poison, and here grows no other living thing. Still, eat and live on, for I wait a message."

"A message from whom?" asked Rachel.

"A message from the dead, Sister. It was promised to me by Nya before she passed, and if it does not come, then it will be time to die."

So they made fire and boiled the moss till it was a horrible, sticky substance, which they swallowed as best they could, washing it down with gulps of water. Still it was food of a kind, and for a while stayed the gnawing, empty pains within them; only Noie ate but little, so that there might be more for the others.

That night was even hotter than those that had gone before, and during the day which followed the place became like a hell. They crept into the cave and lay there gasping, while from without came loud cracking sounds, caused, as they thought, by the trees of the forest splitting in the heat. About midday the sky suddenly became densely overcast, although no breath stirred; the air was thicker than ever, to breathe it was like breathing hot cream. In their restless despair they wandered out of the cave, and to their surprise saw a dwarf standing upon the top of the wall. It was Eddo, who called to them to come out and give themselves up.

"What are the terms?" asked Noie.

"That thou and the Wanderer shall die by the White Death, and that the Inkosazana shall be installed Mother of the Trees," was the answer.

"We refuse them," said Noie. "Let us go now and give us food and escort, and thou shalt be spared. Refuse, and it is thou and thy people who will die by that Red Death which Nya promised thee."

"That we shall learn before to-morrow," said Eddo with a mocking laugh, and vanished down the wall.

As he went a hot gust of wind burst upon them, causing the forest without to rock and groan. Noie turned her face towards it and seemed to listen.

"What is it?" asked Rachel.

"I heard a voice in the wind, Sister," she answered. "The message I awaited has come to me."

"What message?" asked Richard listlessly.

"That I will tell you by and by, Chief," she answered. "Come to the cave, it is no longer safe here, the hurricane breaks."

So supporting each other they crept back to the cave, and there Noie made fire, feeding it with the idols and precious woods that had been brought thither as offerings. Richard and Rachel watched her wondering, for it seemed strange that she should make a fire in that heat where there was nothing to cook. Meanwhile gust succeeded gust, until a tempest of screaming wind swept over them, though no rain fell. Soon it was so fierce that the deep-rooted Tree of the Tribe rocked above them, and loose stones were blown from the crest of the great wall.

Then of a sudden Noie sprang up, and seized a flaming brand from the fire; it was the limb of a fetish, made of some resinous wood. She ran from the cave swiftly, before they could stop her, and vanished in the gathering gloom, to return again in a few moments weak and breathless.

"Come out, now," she said, "and see a sight such as you shall never behold again," and there was something so strange in her voice that, notwithstanding their weakness, they rose and followed her.

Outside the cave they could not stand because of the might of the hurricane, but cast themselves upon the ground, and following Noie's outstretched arm, looked up towards the top of the mound. Then they saw that the Tree of the Tribe was *on fire*. Already its vast trunk and boughs were wrapped in flame, which burnt furiously because of the resin within them, while long flakes of blazing moss were being swept away to leeward, to fall among the forest that lay beyond the wall.

"Did you do this?" cried Rachel to Noie.

"Aye, Zoola, who else? That was the message which came to me. Now my office is fulfilled, but you two will live though I must die, I who have destroyed the People of the Dwarfs; I who was born that I should destroy them."

"Destroyed them!" exclaimed Rachel. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that when their Tree dies, they die, the whole race of them. Oh! Nya told me, Nya told me —they die as their Tree dies, by fire. To the Wall, to the Wall now, and look. Follow me."

Forgetting their hunger-bred weakness in the wild excitement of that moment, Rachel and Richard struggled hand in hand, after Noie's thin, ethereal form. Across the open space they struggled, through the furious buffetings of the gale, sometimes on their feet, sometimes on their hands and knees, till they came to the great wall where a stairway ran up it to an outlook tower. Up this stair they climbed slowly since at times the weight of the wind pinned them against the blocks of stone, till at length they reached its crest and crept into the shelter of the hollow tower. Hence, looking through the loopholes in the ancient masonry, they saw a fearful sight. The flakes of burning moss from the Tree of the Tribe had fallen among the tops of the forest, parched almost to tinder with drought and heat, and fired them here and there. Fanned by the screaming gale the flames spread rapidly, leaping from tree to tree, now in one direction, now in another, as the hurricane veered, which it did continually, till the whole green forest became a sheet of fire, an ever-widening sheet which spread east and west and north and south for miles and miles and tens of miles.

Earth and sky were one blaze of light given out by the torch-like resinous trees as they burned from the top downwards. By that intense light the three watchers could see hundreds of the People of the Dwarfs

flitting about between the trunks. Waving their arms and gibbering, they rushed this way and that, to the north to be met by fire, to the south to be met by fire, till at length the blazing boughs and boles fell upon them and they disappeared in showers of red sparks, or, more fortunate, fled away, never to return, before the flame that leapt after them. One company of them ran towards the Sanctuary; they could see them threading their path between the trees, and growing ever fewer as the burning branches fell among them from above. They leapt, they ran, they battled, springing this way and that, but ever the great flaring boughs crashed down among them, crushing them, shrivelling them up, till at length of all their number but a single man staggered into the open belt between the edge of the forest and the wall. His white hair and his garments seemed to be smouldering. He gripped at them with his hands, then coming to a little bush—it was the top of Nya's tree which she had thrust into the ground to grow there—dragged it up and began to beat himself with it as though to extinguish the flames. In an instant it took fire also, burning him horribly, so that with a yell he threw it to the ground, and ran on towards the wall. As he came they saw his face. It was that of Eddo.

At this moment, seized by some sudden weakness, Noie sank down upon the stones. Richard bent over her to lift her to her feet again, but she thrust him away, saying slowly and in gasps:

"Let me be, the doom has hold of me, I am dying. I passed within the Fence to fire the Tree, and its poison is at work within me, and the curse of all my people has fallen on my head. Yet I have saved thee, my sister, I have saved thee and thy lover, for the Dwarfs are no more, the Grey People are grey ashes. For my love's sake I did the sin; let my love atone the sin if it may, or at the least think kindly of me through the long, happy years that are to come, and at the end of

them then seek for lost Noie in the World of Ghosts if she may be found there."

As she spoke they heard a sound of something scrambling among the stones, and at one of the four entrances of the turret there appeared a hideous, fire-twisted face, and a little form about which hung charred and smouldering strips of raiment. It was Eddo, who had climbed the wall and found them out. There he sat glowering at them, or rather at Noie, who was crouched upon the floor.

"Come hither, daughter of Seyapi," he screamed in his hissing, snake-like voice, "come hither, and see thy work, thou who hast made an end of the ancient People of the Ghosts. Come hither and tell me why thou didst this thing, for I would learn the truth before I die, that I may make report of it to the Fathers of our race."

Noie heard, and crept towards him; to Rachel and Richard it seemed as though she could not disobey that summons. Now they sat face to face outside the turret, clinging to the stones, and her long hair flowed outwards on the gale.

"I did it, Eddo," she said, "to save one whom I love, and him whom she loves. I did it to avenge the death of Nya upon you all, as she bade me to do. I did it because the cup of thy wickedness is full, and because I was appointed to bring thy doom upon thee. Thus ends the greatness thou hast plotted so many years to win, Eddo."

"Aye," he answered, "thus it ends, for the magic of the White One there has overcome me, and thus with it ends the reign of the Ghost Kings, and the forest wherein they reigned, and thus too, thou endest, traitress, who hast murdered them and whose soul shall be spilt with their souls."

As the words left his lips suddenly Eddo sprang upon Noie and gripped her about the middle. Richard and Rachel leapt forward, but before ever they could

lay a hand upon her to save her, the dwarf in his rage and agony had dragged her to the edge of the wall. For a moment they struggled there in the vivid light of the flaming forest. Then Eddo screamed aloud, one wild, savage shriek, and still holding Noie in his arms hurled himself from the wall, to fall crushed upon its foundation stones sixty feet beneath.

Thus perished Noie, who, for love's sake, gave her life to save Rachel, as once Rachel had saved her.

It was morning, and after the tempest the sky was clear and cool, for heavy rain had fallen when the wind dropped, although far away the dense clouds of rolling smoke showed where the great fire still ate into the heart of the forest. Rachel and Richard, seated hand in hand in the little tower on the wall, looked at one another in that pure light, and saw signs in each other's face that could not be mistaken.

"What shall we do?" asked Richard. "Death is very near to us."

Rachel thought awhile, then answered:

"The dwarfs are gone, we have nothing more to fear from them. Yonder where the fire did not burn, dwell their slaves, whose villages are full of food, and beyond them live the Umkulu, who know and would befriend me. Let us go and seek food who desire to live on together, if we may."

So they climbed down the wall, and with difficulty, for they were very feeble, crawled over the stones which they had piled up in the passage to keep out the dwarfs, and thus passed to the open belt beyond. A strange scene met their eyes, all the wide lands that had been covered with giant trees were now piled over with white ashes amongst which, here and there, stood a black and smouldering trunk. The journey was terrible, but following a ridge of rock whereon no great trees had grown, hand in hand they passed through the outer edge of the burnt forest in safety,

until they came to one of the towns of the slaves upon the fertile plain beyond, which led up to the desert. No human being could they see, since all had fled, but the kraal was full of sheep and cattle that had been penned there before the fire began, and in the huts were milk and food in plenty. They drank of the milk and, after a while, ate a little, then rested and drank more milk, till their strength began to return to them. Towards evening they went out of the town, and standing on a mound looked at the fire-wasted plain behind, and the green, grassy slopes in front.

They seemed quite alone in the world, those two, and yet their hearts were full of joy and thankfulness, for while they were left to each other they knew that they could never be alone.

"See, Rachel," said Richard, pointing to the smouldering wreck of the forest, "there lies our past, and here in front of us spreads the future clothed with flowers."

"Yes, Richard," she answered, "but Noie and all whom I love save you are buried in that past, and in front of us the desert is not far away."

"Life is ours, Rachel, and love is ours, and that which saved us through many a danger and brought me back to you, will surely keep us safe. Do you fear to pass the desert at my side?"

She looked at him with shining eyes, and answered:

"No, Richard, I fear no more, for now I seem to hear the voice of Noie speaking in my heart, telling me that trouble is behind us, and that we shall live out our lives together, as my mother foresaw that we should do."

And there on the mound, standing between that dead sea of ashes and the green slopes of flowering plain, Rachel stretched out her arms to the man to whom she was decreed.

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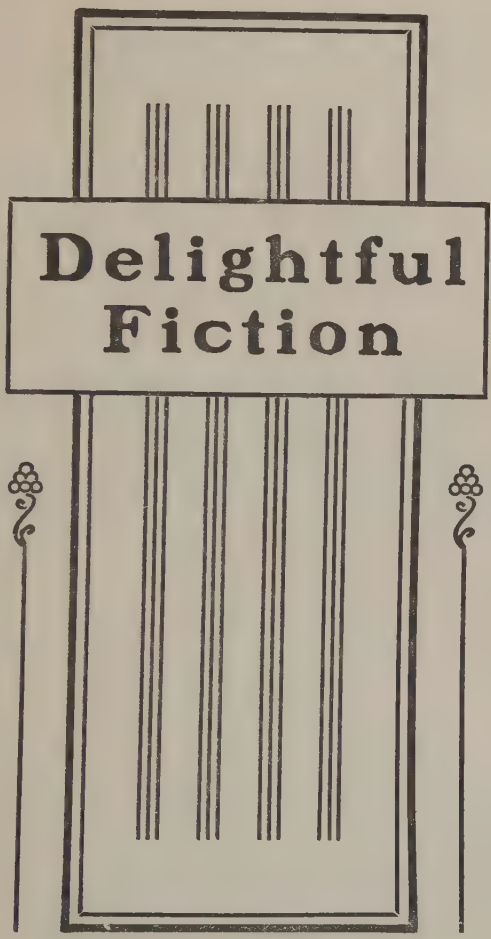

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